

The Waning Sword

Conversion Imagery and
Celestial Myth in *Beowulf*



EDWARD PETTIT

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by Edward Pettit



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*Very bright was that sword when it was made whole again;
the light of the sun shone redly in it, and the light of the moon
shone cold, and its edge was hard and keen.*

*And Aragorn gave it a new name and called it Andúril,
Flame of the West.*

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*



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*Grendel's mother by Russell Marks.
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In memoriam

Alan Paul Pettit

24 January 1918–15 May 1995

Hazell Macdonald Pettit

4 October 1923–16 March 2016

Robert Charles Pettit

20 June 1955–10 March 2011

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Signs and Abbreviations

- * Hypothetical or reconstructed word-form
- AbäG *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*
- AEW F. Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd edn. (Heidelberg, 1974)
- ANEW J. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 4th edn. (Leiden, 2000)
- ANF *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*
- ANQ *American Notes & Queries*
- ASE *Anglo-Saxon England*
- ASPR G. P. Krapp and E. van K. Dobbie (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition* (New York, 1931–53)
- BJRL *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
- BT T. N. Toller (ed.), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth, D.D., F.R.S.* (Oxford, 1898)
- BTS T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth: Supplement* (Oxford, 1921), with A. Campbell, *Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda* (Oxford, 1972)
- C&M *Classica et Mediaevalia*
- corr. corrected
- CV R. Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. (Oxford 1957)
- DOE A. Cameron, A. C. Amos, A. diP. Healey *et al.* (ed.), *Dictionary of Old English: A to H online* (Toronto, 2016)
- EDD J. Wright (ed.), *English Dialect Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898–1905)
- EETS Early English Text Society
- ELH *English Literary History*
- ELL *English Language and Linguistics*
- ELN *English Language Notes*
- e.s. extra series (EETS)
- ES *English Studies*

- FSN Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda* (Reykjavík, 1950)
- GD K. Friis-Jensen (ed.) and P. Fisher (trans.), *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes* (Oxford, 2015)
- HG R. North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1997)
- ÍF Íslenzk fornrit
- ÍÓ Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon, *Íslensk orðsifjabók* (Reykjavík, 1989, corr. rpt., 1995)
- JAF *Journal of American Folklore*
- JAOS *Journal of the American Oriental Society*
- JEGP *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
- JWCI *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*
- KB R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (ed.), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn. (Toronto, 2008)
- LP Sveinbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 2nd edn. (Copenhagen, 1931)
- LSE *Leeds Studies in English*
- MÆ *Medium Ævum*
- MED F. McSparran et al. (ed.), *Middle English Dictionary*, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary>
- MHG Middle High German
- MIFL S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, rev. and enlarged edn. (Bloomington, 1955–8)
- MGH *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
- MLN *Modern Language Notes*
- MLR *Modern Language Review*
- MP *Modern Philology*
- NM *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
- N&Q *Notes and Queries*
- OE Old English
- OED J. Simpson (ed.), *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn. on CD-ROM, v. 4.0 (Oxford, 2009)
- OHG Old High German
- ON Old Norse
- ONP Aldís Sigurðardóttir et al. (ed.), *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, <https://onp.ku.dk>
- o.s. original series (EETS)
- OT *Oral Tradition*
- pl. plate(s)
- PL J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1844–64)

- PMLA *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*
 PQ *Philological Quarterly*
 PTP K. E. Gade and E. Marold (ed.), *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*,
 SPSMA 3 (Turnhout, 2017)
 RES *Review of English Studies*
 SASE H. R. E. Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its
 Archæology and Literature* (corr. rpt. Woodbridge, 1994)
 SASE5–7 P. Mortimer and M. Bunker (ed.), *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon
 England from the 5th to 7th Century* (Ely, 2019)
 SBVS *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*
 SnEGylf A. Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*
 (Oxford, 1982)
 SnESkald A. Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 2 vols
 (London, 1998)
 SP *Studies in Philology*
 SPSMA *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*
 s.s. supplementary series (EETS)
 SS *Scandinavian Studies*
 s.v. *sub verbo* (or *sub verbis*): ‘under the word(s)’
 v.l. *varia lectio*: ‘variant reading’

1. Introduction

Beowulf, an Early Anglo-Saxon Epic

The Old English heroic poem known today by the editorial title of *Beowulf* survives, albeit damaged, in a single source: Cotton Vitellius A.xv of the British Library in London. This is a composite of two manuscripts, often called the Southwick Codex and the Nowell Codex, which were probably combined in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The latter manuscript, which contains *Beowulf*, is thought likely to date from between the late tenth and early eleventh centuries AD.¹

Beowulf, however, is almost certainly older than its sole surviving witness. How much older has long been a matter of scholarly debate, with opinions ranging widely, in the main from the seventh to the early eleventh centuries. However, recent detailed research into the poem's language, metre and textual transmission argues forcefully that there was a version in the Mercian dialect c. AD 700, and for the existence of a written archetype in the early eighth century.² In this study I accept

-
- 1 On the *Beowulf*-manuscript, see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), 281–3 (dates it 's. x/xi'); *KB*, xxv–xxxv. Editions of *Beowulf* include *ASPR* 4; E. von Schaubert (ed.), *Heyne-Schückings Beowulf*, 17th edn. (Paderborn, 1958–61); M. Swanton (ed.), *Beowulf* (Manchester, 1978); C. L. Wrenn and W. F. Bolton (ed.), *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment*, rev. 3rd edn. (Exeter, 1988); G. Jack (ed.), *Beowulf: A Student Edition* (Oxford, 1994); B. Mitchell and F. C. Robinson, *Beowulf: An Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts* (Oxford, 1998); K. Kiernan (ed.), *Electronic Beowulf*, 4th edn., <http://ebeowulf.uky.edu/ebeo4.0/start.html>; and *KB*, the latest scholarly edition. Quotations from *Beowulf* in the present study are punctuated and translated according to my understanding of the text, unless otherwise indicated. Full modern English translations of the poem are legion; for a recommended prose example, see S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1982).
 - 2 See R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Metre* (Philadelphia, 1992); M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41; D. Cronan, 'Poetic Words, Conservatism and the Dating of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 33 (2004), 23–50; L. Neidorf (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Woodbridge, 2014), the title of which references

such a date for the earliest traceable form of the Old English poem, if somewhat anxiously, given that scholarly dissension is likely to continue over what remains, for this field, a hot topic.³ The many arguments that have been advanced down the years to date *Beowulf's* composition are often highly detailed and highly divergent in their conclusions. They will not be rehearsed in this book, but two fundamental and readily apprehensible linguistic points strike me as most significant. The first is that *Beowulf* appears to contain no loanwords from Old Norse, despite comprising well over three thousand lines of verse about Scandinavians in Scandinavia.⁴ The second is that none of the poem's many proper nouns, some of which have equivalents in Old Norse texts, appear to show any influence from Old Norse phonology.⁵ In my view, these

C. Chase (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981); L. Neidorf, *The Transmission of Beowulf: Language, Culture and Scribal Behavior* (Ithaca, 2017). This dating is not very far removed from that of surviving artefacts suggestive of some items and traditions described in the poem, such as those found in the seventh-century ship-burial in Mound One at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk. In addition, Anglo-Saxon place-name evidence suggests that 'by the tenth century at least, and no doubt much earlier, it was customary to name pits, meres and bogs after someone or something called Grendel, presumably a demon, water-monster or other sort of "genius loci"', and it might point to a link between Grendel's mere and a precursor of the figure of Beowulf before the early tenth century; see M. Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum* and Wessex', rpt. in M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London, 1996), 271–311 at 299–304 (quotation at 301); earlier, R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, 3rd edn. with supplement by C. L. Wrenn (Cambridge, 1963), 304–10. For an influential study of *Beowulf* in a seventh-century context, see R. Girvan, *Beowulf and the Seventh Century: Language and Content* (London, 1971). For surveys and discussion of the dizzying number of views about the date and origins of *Beowulf*, see R. E. Bjork and A. Obermeier, 'Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences', in R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (ed.), *A Beowulf Handbook* (Exeter, 1997), 13–34; R. Frank, 'A Scandal in Toronto: The Dating of *Beowulf*' a Quarter Century On', *Speculum* 82 (2007), 843–64.

- 3 For dissenting views, see B. R. Hutcheson, 'Kaluza's Law, the Dating of *Beowulf*, and the Old English Poetic Tradition', *JEGP* 103 (2004), 297–322; E. G. Stanley, 'Paleographical and Textual Deep Waters: (a) for <u> and <u> for (a), <d> for <?> and <?> for <d> in Old English', *ANQ* 15 (2002), 64–72; Frank, 'Scandal'; H. Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendel-Kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England* (Morgantown, 2015). For a renewed defence of an early date, see R. D. Fulk, 'Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 32 (2003), 1–26.
- 4 S. Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1993), 14.
- 5 Cf. Newton, *Origins*, 14–5; on the poem's names, see T. Shippey, 'Names in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', in Neidorf, *Dating of Beowulf*, 58–78. For a recent study which finds the poem devoid of linguistic influence from Old Norse, see L. Neidorf and R. J. Pascual, 'Old Norse Influence on the Language of *Beowulf*: A Reassessment', *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 31 (2019), 298–322.

points (and others) swing the pendulum of probability firmly toward an early, pre-Viking Age origin.

Very recently, the likelihood of such an origin has, I incline to think, been substantially increased by the Swedish archaeologist Bo Gräslund.⁶ He has rather thrown the cat amongst the pigeons by proposing that behind the *c.* 700 Old English *Beowulf* there lies a product of sixth-century East Scandinavian oral tradition, a poem which, having taken Old English form *c.* 600, was subsequently retold, with the addition of a veneer of Christianity, by Anglo-Saxon poets in Mercian and West Saxon dialects. I am persuaded by Gräslund's linking of key aspects of *Beowulf*'s material culture and many of its events and characters to the late Migration Age in Gotland, Sweden and Denmark. I am also attracted by his claim that the poem's core narrative was transmitted from Scandinavia to Anglo-Saxon England, perhaps through the court of King Rædwald of East Anglia. It remains to be seen, however, what the wider scholarly community will make of Gräslund's findings, which effectively propose an Anglo-Gotlandic/Swedish *Beowulf*, the core of which originated in Scandinavia and was transmitted across time, space, languages and dialects by a series of poets (number and identity unknown) using mainly oral techniques. Convincing validation or refutation of this bold proposal will require considered judgements, over a period of years, from many scholars with expertise in a wide range of disciplines, including Old English language and literature, Germanic philology, mythology, oral and literary poetics, translation, archaeology and early Christianity.

Given that Gräslund's basic proposal may receive wide acceptance, it is important for me to stress at the start of this book that the *Beowulf* I discuss is *not* his putative pagan Nordic *ur-Beowulf*, but rather the Old English poem preserved in Cotton Vitellius A.xv and its presumed Mercian predecessor, complete with Judaeo-Christian elements.

As will become clear, I am not persuaded by Gräslund's claim that *Beowulf* acquired merely a thin veneer of Anglo-Saxon Christianity, or at least that its Judaeo-Christian elements may be deemed superficial, and therefore by implication less worthy of respect, even if they may well be secondary in terms of the poem's development through time. Rather, I consider most, if not all, of them the sensitive, considered—though not necessarily highly sophisticated—integrations of a Christian

6 B. Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet. Den nordiska bakgrunden* (Uppsala, 2018).

Anglo-Saxon poet or poets (although not ideal, for simplicity's sake I henceforth refer simply to a single Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*-poet) who in retelling the basic story extensively recreated it. Lacking any evidence to the contrary, it seems at least respectful to suppose that both this poet and his audience found the Judaeo-Christian elements unobjectionable at worst. In fact, these elements, whether explicit, inexplicit or so finely woven into the poem's fabric as to be inseparable from it (or even undetectable), seem to me integral to the Old English composition and vital to its interpretation in an Anglo-Saxon context.⁷ Whatever its background, therefore, I treat the Old English *Beowulf* as an artistic entity worthy of appreciation in its own right on its own terms.

The poem's Judaeo-Christian elements would have been especially important if, as now seems likely, the poem circulated in Mercia in the sixth and seventh centuries, because, as we shall see, this places *Beowulf* within a period of religious flux in Anglo-Saxon England. This finding prompts my fundamental view (pursued later in this Introduction and further in my Conclusion) that the Anglo-Saxon poem implicitly addresses the nature of the Conversion process from Germanic paganism to Christianity and assuages associated anxieties.

That said, many of my other findings depend neither on an early date, nor a Mercian background, nor an interest in the Conversion, although an early date would help to explain the preservation of the many old traditions and word-meanings that *Beowulf* seems to contain. Most of my findings could also suit an essentially East Anglian poem (an attractive possibility),⁸ a poem from the Mercia-Wessex border area,⁹ or one

7 Note especially a brief but important passage at the centre of the poem (unmentioned by Gräslund): *Da com non dægæs* 'Then had come [or 'came'] the ninth hour of the day' (1600). These words implicitly, but unmistakably, relate Beowulf's presumed death in Grendel's mere to Christ's death on the Cross (see Chapter 3); this allusion has profound implications for the poem's interpretation by an Anglo-Saxon audience. Personally, I also find it hard not to see a strongly Christian dimension to the *soðfaestra dom* 'glory/judgement of the righteous' (2820) which Beowulf's soul seeks after the hero's actual death. More controversially, perhaps, I incline to the view that Christianity is likely to infuse the expansive, reflective, melancholic, refined and ultimately rather mild spirit of *Beowulf* in general. In this regard, at least, *Beowulf* is unlike any of the surviving Old Norse poems of substance that are likely to be fairly early and essentially pagan; it contrasts starkly, for example, with the short and direct savagery of the Eddic poem *Hamðismál* 'The Lay of Hamðir'.

8 For an attractive argument for such a derivation, see Newton, *Origins*. Unfortunately, very little is known of the Old English dialect of East Anglia.

9 For evidence suggesting that 'a context for the poem's conception and especially its transmission can be discovered in and in the vicinity of pre-Conquest Malmesbury',

composed or revised elsewhere in the country, even during a later period of widespread Scandinavian settlement. Indeed, it might be thought that the presence of many Norsemen in England during later centuries could explain *Beowulf's* Scandinavian setting and the correspondences between some of its episodes and those of Old Norse texts.¹⁰ However, in my view, Gräslund's findings, together with the apparently total absence of Old Norse linguistic influence on *Beowulf*, weigh strongly against this possibility. Such a context might have encouraged the poem's preservation, but probably did not stimulate its creation.

If *Beowulf* did exist in sixth- or seventh-century Mercia, where exactly (or even inexactly) within this large region it circulated or resided is another uncertainty.¹¹ However, the poem's reference to Biblical events, together with its deep interest in the actions and characters of kings and military nobles, as well as kin-slaying and dynastic succession, might point to a monastery linked to Mercian royalty, or to an affiliated community such as a non-monastic church.

One such potential home for *Beowulf* was the double monastery at Repton, Derbyshire, founded c. 675.¹² It housed noble monks and nuns,

see Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm' (quotation at 310). Malmesbury was on the border between Mercia and Wessex.

- 10 Given the dating of the surviving written text of *Beowulf* to c. 1000 (the poem's *terminus ante quem*) on palaeographical grounds, and the indications of prior scribal transmission, it seems clear that the poem existed before the period when Danes ruled England. This began under Sweyn Forkbeard in 1013–4 and continued under his son, Canute, from 1016–35.
- 11 For a map of Mercia in the eighth and early ninth centuries, see R. North, *The Origins of Beowulf: from Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford, 2006), 149. Whether *Beowulf* was ever performed is uncertain, though its apparent transmission down the years through multiple copies encourages the assumption, as does its marked use of techniques typical of oral composition. If the poem was performed, it is still more sobering to acknowledge that we do not know how. For example, if there was once a *Beowulfian* music—if the poet sang, possibly to the accompaniment of a lyre—his notes are lost, though reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon lyres offer tantalizing insights into the possibilities for instrumental accompaniment. For a video recording of a performance of the first 1,062 lines of *Beowulf* in Old English, accompanied by the lyre, see B. Bagby, *Beowulf* (2006) [DVD: Koch Vision, KOC-DV-6445]. For full, unaccompanied recitations, see K. Malone, *Beowulf (Complete) Read in Old English* ([1967]) [4 LPs: Caedmon TC 4001]; T. Eaton, *Beowulf — Read in Anglo-Saxon* (1997) [2 CDs: Pearl; Pavilion Records; SHE CDS 9632].
- 12 On Repton monastery, see M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopædia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999), 390–2; M. Biddle and B. Kjølbye-Biddle, 'Repton and the "Great Army", 873–4', in J. Graham-Campbell, R. Hall, J. Jesch and D. N. Parsons (ed.), *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21–30 August 1997* (Oxford, 2001), 45–96. North, *Origins*, argues that *Beowulf* originated at the nearby minster of Breedon on the Hill in 826–7.

and became the burial site of Mercian royalty, including Æthelbald (757), Wiglaf (c. 839) and Wigstan (849).¹³ It might even be Æthelbald who is depicted as a rider armed with sword, shield and knife—equipment also used by the eponymous hero of *Beowulf* during his (unmounted) fight with a dragon—on one face of a fragmentary stone carving from Repton. Other faces on the same stone appear to show the Crucifixion—an event alluded to in *Beowulf* (line 1600)—and a serpentine monster with a man-like face devouring the heads of two men. The latter scene may well represent the mouth of Hell; its monster is somewhat suggestive of Grendel, the poem's troll-man, who, although not ostensibly snake-like, was a human-devouring demon who inhabited a serpent-harboured mere identified with Hell.¹⁴ Additionally, it so happens that among Repton's monks was one Guðlac (c. 674–714),¹⁵ parts of whose story resemble aspects of *Beowulf*, especially the central mere-episode. These merit summary here because, if nothing else, they show that a tale rather similar to, and conceivably influenced by, *Beowulf*'s mere-episode existed in England in the first half of the eighth century.

According to the *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* 'Life of Saint Guthlac', written by the monk Felix c. 730–40,¹⁶ Guðlac descended from kings whose lineage stretched back to Icel, a legendary Germanic ruler whose father, Eomer, appears briefly in *Beowulf* (1960–2). As a young man, Guðlac had been inspired to take up arms by remembrance of the valiant deeds of ancient heroes, which he had presumably heard about from recitations of Old English poems. After fighting gloriously for nine years on the western

13 Wiglaf is also the name of the warrior who helps slay the dragon at the end of *Beowulf*. Cf. North, *Origins*, 150.

14 See M. Biddle and B. Kjøbye-Biddle, 'The Repton Stone', *ASE* 14 (1985), 233–92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0263675100001368>; Biddle and Kjøbye-Biddle, 'Repton', 50, 53 (fig. 4.4); P. Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995), 58–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511597527>. That Grendel's mere is identifiable with Hell is evident from *Beowulf* 101, 788, 852, 1274. Grendel's nature as a devilish *eoten* '(consuming) giant' finds parallel in the draconic *þotunn* Satan of an Old Norse translation of the Harrowing of Hell, for which see C. R. Unger (ed.), *Heilagra manna sögur*, 2 vols (Christiania, 1877), II, 3; G. L. Aho, '*Nidrstigningsarsaga*: An Old Norse Version of Christ's Harrowing of Hell', *SS* 41 (1969), 150–9; J. W. Marchand, 'Leviathan and the Mousetrap in the *Nidrstigningsarsaga*', *SS* 47 (1975), 328–38.

15 On Guðlac, see Lapidge *et al.*, *Blackwell Encyclopædia*, 222–3.

16 B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (Cambridge, 1956). Felix's *Life* was also translated into Old English. In addition, there are two Old English poems about Guðlac, for which see J. Roberts (ed.), *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book* (Oxford, 1979).

borders of Mercia, he was struck one wakeful night by the wretchedness of the deaths of his royal ancestors and the transitory nature of earthly riches and glory. This realization prompted him to enter the monastery at Repton. After two years of spiritual education and exemplary virtue, he left to live as a hermit in a hut on a barrow in the marshy wilderness of Crowland, Lincolnshire. There he kept watch by night, but was attacked by demons who submerged him in the fen's dark waters and took him to fiery Hell. Guðlac defied his abductors, though, identifying them as the *semen Cain* 'seed of Cain'.¹⁷ Immediately afterwards he was saved by the miraculous appearance in Hell of St. Bartholomew, bathed in a golden, heavenly light so glorious that the demons could not bear it. Bartholomew commanded them to escort Guðlac safely back to his home, which they did.

Similarly, Beowulf was an exemplary warrior, both physically and temperamentally, who won all his battles. As Guðlac kept watch by night in his hut in a marshy landscape, so Beowulf kept watch by night in Heorot, hall of the Danes, not far from Grendel's marshy home. As Guðlac was attacked by demons identified as the offspring of Cain, so Beowulf was assaulted by the devilish Grendel and Grendel's monstrous mother, themselves descendants of Cain (102–14, 1258–67). As demons dragged Guðlac through dark fen-water and down to fiery Hell, only to be thwarted by the sudden appearance of heavenly light, so Grendel's mother drew Beowulf down through the polluted waters of a fenland mere to her fiery, hellish lair,¹⁸ only to succumb in a sudden illumination by heavenly light.¹⁹

For what it is worth given the huge gaps in our knowledge, we know of nowhere other than Repton that can claim all of the following: existence *c.* 700 in Mercia; close ties to Mercian royalty; carvings of an armed warrior, the Crucifixion, and a partly man-like man-eating monster at the mouth of Hell; and a prominent alumnus whose story

17 Colgrave, *Felix's Life*, 106–7.

18 Cf. *seo hell*, a female personification of Hell in the Old English translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*; see L. Bell, "'Hel our Queen": An Old Norse Analogue to an Old English Female Hell', *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 263–8, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0017816000001358>

19 Also common to both stories is the theme of reflection on the deaths of ancient kings and the transience of life and earthly riches. For further parallels between accounts of Guðlac's life and *Beowulf*, see M. E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of 'Beowulf'* (London, 1970), 116–8, 257–9; North, *Origins*, 159.

resembles *Beowulf's* in key respects. We have no direct evidence of a link between *Beowulf* and Repton,²⁰ but in view of the probably highly diverse nature of monastic communities at this time, and of their links to lay society and monarchy, it would at least make sense for the poem to have been associated with *some* such milieu.²¹

That poems about ancient Germanic heroes were recited for clergy in Anglian (perhaps Mercian) communities in the eighth century, though probably in a *non-monastic* context, is indicated by a passage from a letter written by the Anglo-Saxon scholar and churchman Alcuin. In 797 he addressed a certain Bishop Speratus, who is possibly identifiable as Unuuona (Unwana, Unwano) of Leicester.²² Alcuin declared that Speratus should feed the poor, rather than host *istriones vel luxoriosos* 'entertainers or persons of extravagant behaviour'.²³ He continued:

Verba Dei legantur in sacerdotali convivio. Ibi decet lectorem audiri, non citharistam: sermones patrum, non carmina gentilium. Quid Hinieldus cum Christo? Angusta est domus: utrosque tenere non poterit. Non vult rex celestis cum paganis et perditis nominatenus regibus communionem habere; quia rex ille aeternus regnat in caelis, illes paganus perditus plangit in inferno. Voces legentium audire in domibus tuis, non ridentium turbam in plateis.²⁴

Let God's words be read at the episcopal dinner-table. It is right that a reader should be heard, not a harpist, patristic discourse, not pagan song. What has Hiniel[d] to do with Christ? The house is narrow and has no room for both. The Heavenly King does not wish to have communion

20 We do not even have evidence of manuscripts from, or a library at, Repton.

21 By c. 750 the monastic situation in England appears highly varied and complex. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), 82 observes that 'no rule is likely to have excluded the presence of diverse groups of people within and around the minster enclosure, nor to have prevented social, economic, or pastoral contacts between the monastic personnel and a wider lay community'. Blair also remarks on the 'many channels by which [monastic] communities obtained rulership, learning, cultural guidance and economic support', and notes that the insular monastic model 'was infinitely extendable and flexible, and could appeal in different ways to learned bishops, successful war-leaders, widowed queens, royal servants and spiritually minded peasants' (83).

22 See D. A. Bullough, 'What Has Ingeld to Do with Lindisfarne?', *ASE* 22 (1993), 93–125, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0263675100004336>. Bullough argues against the earlier assumption that Alcuin was addressing behaviour at a monastic community on Lindisfarne.

23 E. Dümmler (ed.), *Epistolae Karolini Aevi Tomus II*, MGH, epistolarum tomus IV (Berlin, 1895), 183.

24 Dümmler, *Epistolae*, II, 183.

with pagan and forgotten [or 'damned'] kings listed name by name: for the eternal King reigns in Heaven, while the forgotten [or 'damned'] pagan king wails in Hell. The voices of readers should be heard in your dwellings, not the laughing rabble in the courtyards.²⁵

Some around Speratus' table had presumably taken a different view. They enjoyed listening to what were probably Old English poems, perhaps sung to the accompaniment of a lyre, about pagan heroes. These heroes included *Hinieldus*, who appears briefly in *Beowulf* as *Ingeld*, a prince of the Germanic Heaðo-Beardan tribe (2064–6). Conceivably, *Beowulf* was among the poems recited at Speratus' table.²⁶

It seems most unlikely that an Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*-poet will ever be conclusively located, let alone identified. But if the poem was probably in existence c. 700, even this single finding is potentially highly valuable for efforts to contextualize and interpret it.

For one thing, this date places the poem well before the period of Viking attacks on England, which began in the late eighth century and led to the settlement of large parts of Mercia by Norsemen.²⁷ This could explain both the lack of Old Norse linguistic influence upon *Beowulf* and the poem's committed and generally sympathetic approach to the world of early sea-faring Norsemen.

For another, such a dating places the poem roughly three hundred years closer than the scribes of Cotton Vitellius A.xv to the events and people described, many of which have been dated to the fifth and sixth centuries.²⁸ This encourages belief that many of the tales told in the poem

25 Translation adapted from Bullough, 'What Has Ingeld?', 124.

26 If *nominetenus* is correctly translated 'name by name', this suggests not a long, varied poem like *Beowulf*, but much simpler verse genealogies or catalogue-poems such as *Widsið*, another work which mentions Ingeld; K. Malone (ed.), *Widsið*, rev. edn. (Copenhagen, 1962), 24 (line 48). North, *Origins*, 133, however, translates 'so-called' and goes on to make more of the potential *Beowulf*-connection. The *Beowulf*-poet might have agreed with Alcuin that Ingeld had nothing to do with Christ, given that Ingeld is implicated in the burning of Heorot, the exemplary hall of *Beowulf*'s Danes—but I believe he would have maintained the pertinence of *Beowulf*.

27 For evidence of connections between England and Scandinavia before these attacks, see J. Hines, *The Scandinavian Character of Anglian England in the pre-Viking Period* (Oxford, 1984).

28 The death of Hygelac, lord of the Geatas—the Scandinavian (quite possibly Gotlandic) people to which *Beowulf* belongs—is described in the poem and datable from external evidence to c. 530. It serves as a *terminus post quem* for the composition of at least part of the poem. For proposed dates of other events and people mentioned in *Beowulf*, see Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*, 230–1.

could well reflect traditions that had passed down the generations, encapsulated in oral verse.

Such a sense of communal knowledge and of the re-enactment of common story-traditions seems prominently indicated by the poem's opening words: *Hwæt we Gar-Dena in geardagum, þeodcýninga þrym gefrunon* 'How(?) we have heard of the glory of the Spear-Danes, of the people-kings in days of yore!'²⁹ Ostensibly, the audience is to hear what it has already heard; the poet introduces *Beowulf* not as something new, but as a restatement of shared traditions inherited from long ago.

This is not to deny the importance of individual authority, imagination and artistry in the creation and re-creation (performance) of *Beowulf*, especially as the reciter subsequently speaks in the first person (38, 62, 74, etc.). Nor is it necessarily to claim that the Danish and Geatish societies described accurately reflect the historical realities of sixth-century Scandinavia—though it now appears that they may well do, in key respects at least.³⁰ But it *is* to emphasize that the poem was not created *ex nihilo*, and that although subsequent reciters might update tradition—most obviously, it appears, by introducing Christian elements—and perhaps invent new material (though arguably not the very existence of the poem's elusive hero),³¹ they may not have been at liberty fundamentally to misrepresent—in the opinion of their

29 That the use of 'we' in such statements 'emphasizes the communal character of narrative traditions' is noted by W. Parks, 'The Traditional Narrator and the "I Heard" Formulas in Old English Poetry', *ASE* 16 (1987), 45–66 at 56. On the interpretation of the poem's opening word, see G. Walkden, 'The Status of *Hwæt* in Old English', *ELL* 17 (2013), 465–88.

30 Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*, argues strongly that the poem accurately describes distinctive aspects of the culture of East Scandinavia in the late migration period (the decades leading up to 550), a view I find persuasive in many respects. There is, however, an almost complete absence from a poem full of named characters and references to the supernatural and the divine of unambiguous references to Germanic gods with distinctively pagan names—Odin or Thor, for example, are never named (the inconspicuous exception is Ing, about whom I shall have much more to say); in this regard at least, *Beowulf* does not reflect the culture of the times it describes. K. P. Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf: The Paganism of Hrothgar's Danes', *SP* 78 (1981), 91–119 at 92 takes the view that the poem describes the Danish and Geatish societies 'in the social idiom of his [i.e., the Anglo-Saxon poet's] own day, creating an atmosphere and a way of life that would have been familiar to his audience'. Cf. *ibid.*, 107: 'in general, the poem reflects the Anglo-Saxon culture of the age in which it was written.' Both positions have some truth on their side.

31 The hero Beowulf is unknown outside the poem (by this name, at least), but for reasons for thinking that the poem's audience may already have known of a personage of this name, see M. D. C. Drout, Y. Kisor, L. Smith, A. Dennett and

audience—communal lore. In other words, it appears likely that the essence of many of the episodes related could have come from earlier, heathen times, even if they may have been given some ‘new clothes’. Furthermore, the somewhat elliptical manner in which the poem relates complex passages such as the Finnsburg-episode and later detailed sections concerning tribal wars and dynastic relations strongly suggests that, unlike us, his audience had considerable prior knowledge of these matters. The same may be the case for much of the poem’s other, more mythical and fantastic material, on which this book focuses.

Certainly, poems composed using oral-formulaic techniques, examples of which *Beowulf* may itself incorporate,³² are more than capable of preserving the essentials of stories for a period of less than two hundred years, which is all that separates the times of which the poet tells from *c.* 700. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that one basic historical fact was known to the Old English poet, namely that, unlike him, the Scandinavians he described were pagans, worshippers of northern gods.³³ That point presumably constituted a fundamental difference for a Christian, but could also have served as a source of connection. For Anglo-Saxon pagan traditions, many of which are likely to have been akin to those of related peoples in Scandinavia, were probably neither forgotten nor always far from the surface *c.* 700. This likelihood presumably extends to heathen mythology, which, though doubtless never uniform and homogeneous but subject to considerable variation, would, like the mythologies of other peoples, also have had ‘capacity for long-term continuities’, for ‘historical endurance’.³⁴

In Anglo-Saxon England, the seventh century was an age of ferment characterized by the clash of Germanic paganism and Roman

N. Piirainen, *Beowulf Unlocked: New Evidence from Lexomic Analysis* ([n.p.] Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 61–2.

- 32 For recently uncovered evidence indicating that different parts of *Beowulf* draw on different sources (oral or written), see Drout *et al.*, *Beowulf Unlocked*.
- 33 Hence he refers to a *hæðnum horde* ‘heathen hoard’ (2216) and *hæðen gold* ‘heathen gold’ (2276); W. Cooke, ‘Who Cursed Whom, and When? The Cursing of the Hoard and Beowulf’s Fate’, *MÆ* 76 (2007), 207–24 at 219. The successful Christianization of Scandinavia did not get under way until the ninth century; see B. Sawyer and P. Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: from Conversion to Reformation, circa 800–1500* (Minneapolis, 1993), 100–5.
- 34 Frog, ‘Mythology in Cultural Practice: A Methodological Framework for Historical Analysis’, *RMN Newsletter* 10 (2015), 33–57 at 34. He adds: ‘just as the words and grammar of language have a continuity spanning thousands of years, so too do symbols and structures of mythology’ (34).

Christianity. The former stemmed from traditions brought to England by invaders from northern Germany and southern Scandinavia in the fifth century, the latter from St. Augustine's arrival in Thanet in 597. Whatever their political motives for fighting, the armies of kings of rival religions had clashed on the battlefield. Most notably, in 633 the Christian convert Edwin, king of Deira and Bernicia, had died fighting an alliance of enemies led partly by the heathen Mercian Penda; the Christian King Oswald of Northumbria had succumbed to Penda in 641/2; and in 654/5 Oswald's brother and successor, the Christian Oswiu, had finally managed to slay Penda. In the process, Oswiu had struck a decisive blow against paganism—Mercia became officially Christian.

At least that is the authorized, high-level picture after Penda's death. However, it is important for the contextualization and interpretation of *Beowulf* to recognize that, by 700, although Anglo-Saxon England was ruled exclusively by Christian kings, far from all of its people's ingrained heathen ways had been eliminated. As one scholar concludes, following a review of Anglo-Saxon laws forbidding heathen practices:

It is evident ... that while Anglo-Saxon England in the eighth century was Christian in name, heathenism had not been wiped out; it had been driven underground, and apostasy, open or secret, was an ever-present possibility. It seems probable that considerable segments of the people remained to some degree pagan at heart, while practicing a minimum of outward conformity.³⁵

35 Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf', 107. The same scholar goes on to show that 'pagan activities survived in England with great tenacity until long after the time at which *Beowulf* is believed to have been written' (118). See also M. Dunn, *The Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons c.597-c.700: Discourses of Life, Death and Afterlife* (London, 2009), 193. Other studies of this general topic include H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn. (London, 1991) and B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain c.600–800* (Harlow, 2006). Modern academic studies of Anglo-Saxon heathen traditions, some of which—like parts of the present study—continue a long tradition of drawing parallels with later-attested Norse myths, include W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley, 1970); G. R. Owen, *Rites and Religions of the Anglo-Saxons* (Newton Abbot, 1981); S. O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry*, 2 vols (New York, 1989); D. Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (London, 1992); HG; M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (ed.), *Signals of Belief in Early England: Anglo-Saxon Paganism Revisited* (Oxford, 2010); S. Pollington, *The Elder Gods: The Otherworld of Early England* (Ely, 2011). For a sobering review of earlier work in this field, see E. G. Stanley, *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: 'The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism' and 'Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury'* (Woodbridge, 2000).

The implication is that elements of heathen thought, of pagan myth, retained relevance to many people in England at this time.³⁶

For some Anglo-Saxons, a contributing factor to the survival of certain heathen ways was probably experience, or at least awareness, of the severe plagues that ravaged England in the second half of the seventh century.³⁷ Judging from the evidence of cemeteries, these plagues coincided with ‘a revival of traditional beliefs about the potentially dangerous dead and a consequent resort to traditional means to de-activate them’.³⁸ This conclusion chimes with the testimony of the Anglo-Saxon monk Bede (c. 673–735) about apostasies prompted by plague in East Anglia and Northumbria in 664.³⁹ It was only natural that disease, and the threat of it, should have prompted some Anglo-Saxons to return to familiar heathen ways.

Also contributing to the survival of elements of paganism into the early eighth century was a major aspect of the Conversion process, one that supplemented military force, legislation, promises of eternal bliss and threats of perpetual damnation: the methodology of limited accommodation and adaptation. As is well known, Pope Gregory wrote a letter to Bishop Mellitus (d. 624), one of his missionaries to England, instructing him to advise Augustine how to proceed with the people’s Conversion.⁴⁰ He commanded that although their heathen

36 Cf. E. L. Ridsen, *Beasts of Time: Apocalyptic Beowulf* (New York, 1994), 48: ‘A world in conversion, but incompletely converted lies behind the poem’. Note also Frog, ‘Mythology in Cultural Practice’, 44: ‘the arrival of Christianity in the North was not a process of one exclusive religion displacing another. Instead, the new religion richly increased the available symbols in the [symbolic] matrix. Christians and non-Christians were not unaware of each other’s mythologies and they could actively utilize each other’s symbols in mythic discourse as resources for the negotiation of their relationship This sort of engagement has produced quite exceptional narratives that may seem to fall between the respective mythologies.’

37 See J. R. Maddicott, ‘Plague in Seventh-Century England’, *Past & Present* 156 (1997), 7–54; Wentersdorf, ‘*Beowulf*’, 113–5.

38 Dunn, *Christianization*, 192. Cf. Sir F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn. (Oxford, 1971), 128: ‘There is no doubt that Christianity was the dominant religion throughout England in 664. But it is equally certain that the older beliefs of the English people, though driven underground, were still alive.’

39 Wentersdorf, ‘*Beowulf*’, 113–4.

40 B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), 106–9. The pragmatic, adaptive approach recommended in this letter contrasts markedly with Gregory’s earlier, tougher *modus operandi*; see P. Orton, ‘Burning Idols, Burning Bridges: Bede, Conversion and *Beowulf*’, *LSE* 36 (2005), 5–46 at 15–8.

idols—presumably often wooden statues of Germanic gods—should be destroyed, the shrines containing them should be blessed with holy water and converted into houses for Christian altars and relics. Similarly, their sacrifices of cattle to devils (Germanic gods) should be converted into slaughters of cattle for food and accompanied by praise of God for his generosity. Gregory’s recommendation is pragmatic: *ut dum eis aliqua exterius gaudia reseruantur, ad interiora gaudia consentire facilius ualeant. Nam duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium est* ‘thus while some outward rejoicings are preserved, they will be able more easily to share in inward rejoicings. It is doubtless impossible to cut out everything at once from their stubborn minds’.⁴¹

From these findings it is apparent that, if we envisage a *Beowulf*-poet of mature years *c.* 700, he and presumably members of his audience had experienced, and continued to witness, complex times of religious and societal turbulence. These experiences would have influenced their outlooks on life. Some of these people would most likely have been converts to Christianity themselves. They would not be human if they did not retain some emotional attachment to their old ways or to some of the heathens they had known personally, not least their parents. Many such people would surely have welcomed efforts to incorporate aspects of the old ways into the new—to salvage important parts of their identity—or at least to smooth the transition to the new religion.

In my view, *Beowulf* represents one such effort. Of course, the poem is not set in seventh- or eighth-century Mercia or anywhere else in Anglo-Saxon England, notwithstanding the poet’s possible hints of monstrous *mearcstapan* ‘Mercia(?)-steppers’.⁴² But if my view is correct, the poem subtly assuages what for many Anglo-Saxons must have been extreme concern about the fate of deceased ancestors who had not known or accepted Christ. Were those people damned for eternity, regardless of their character and actions? Was there no hope of salvation for even the best of them? Many people must have asked such questions, and the official answers would often have been

41 Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History*, 108–9.

42 Grendel is introduced as a *mearcstapa* ‘mark/march-stepper’ (103); he and his mother are *mearcstapan* ‘mark/march-steppers’ (1348); and Grendel *mearcað* ‘makes a mark’ (450) in their haunts in Denmark, before being killed by a hero from *Wedermearc* ‘We(a)thermark’ (298). These words might pun on *Mierce* ‘Mercia’, from *mearc* ‘mark/march, borderland’; cf. Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendel-Kin*, 183.

uncompromisingly bleak. By contrast, *Beowulf* appears to offer hope, though only subtly and obliquely, through hints and ambiguities, not forthright answers.⁴³ Understandably, the poet mainly addresses such inflammatory questions delicately, through the ambiguous use of allusive mythological symbolism,⁴⁴ which raises potential for the salvation of at least the most virtuous men of old. This he does from a safe temporal and geographical distance. He treats events of long ago and far away, but initially in a country, Denmark, with which many Englishmen would still feel some ancestral connection, and whose people implicitly serve as 'the imaginative stand-ins of the poem's Anglo-Saxon audience'.⁴⁵

That the poet recognized and to some extent respected the heathen status of his characters, and presumably knew that at least some of his audience did too, is indicated by his apparent decision not to 'update' them into Christians. In fact, not only do none of his characters mention Christ or Christian practices, but neither, explicitly, does the poet speaking in his own voice.⁴⁶ What he appears to do instead is 'the best he can',⁴⁷ reasonably, for the best of them: he portrays them as virtuous believers in a single benign deity, whom they address in terms compatible with the Judaeo-Christian God, whereas, in reality, pre-Christian Scandinavians were probably polytheists, even if they may have had a single favourite or governing god. Encouraged by the identification of Grendel and his mother as devilish descendants of the Old Testament fratricide Cain (102–14, 1258–66), and later perhaps by a reference to *ealde riht* 'old law' (2330), a sympathetic Anglo-Saxon

43 Cf. E. G. Stanley, 'Hæthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*', in S. B. Greenfield (ed.), *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur* (Oregon, 1963), 136–51 at 151: 'His [the *Beowulf*-poet's] poetic art is poor in proclamations and assurances, but rich in dark hints and ambiguities.'

44 Cf. Frog, 'Mythology in Cultural Practice', 38: 'mythic symbols are generally characterized by ambiguity: they can be interpreted flexibly and in varying ways'. For prior discussion of multivalent symbolism in *Beowulf*, see Risden, *Beasts of Time*, which stresses that the poet 'makes use not of allegory but of apocalyptic symbols that would suggest many possible meanings to his audience' (114).

45 C. R. Davis, *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (New York, 1996), 108.

46 *Beowulf* does, however, refer to the *miclan domes* 'Great Judgement' (978), and the curse on the dragon's gold was to last until *domes dæg* 'the Day of Judgement [i.e., Doomsday]' (3069).

47 T. A. Shippey, *Beowulf* (London, 1978), 43; supported by Davis, *Beowulf and the Demise*, 182.

audience would naturally equate this single deity with the God of the Old Testament, who was also the God of the New Testament. In other words, the Anglo-Saxons' *Christian* God is effectively smuggled into the poem by inference. What is more, since Christianity taught that there was only ever one true deity, who created all things and who governed all peoples at all times, noble pre-Christians must, in a sense, always have attended to God through their appreciation of, and care for, his creations, albeit inadequately due to their ignorance of his true nature and requirements.⁴⁸ This implicitly puts those good people—whom the poet does *not* label 'heathens' (for him a pejorative term)—on the path to salvation, whether or not they would all reach that destination.⁴⁹ He strongly implies that at least two would by recording firstly, in Beowulf's words, how in death King Hreðel, Beowulf's grandfather, *Godes leoht geceas* 'chose God's light' (2469); and secondly, in his own words, how Beowulf's *sawol* 'soul' departed *secean soðfæstra dom* 'to seek the glory/judgement of the righteous' (2820).⁵⁰

Many of the poem's worst Danes do not receive the same sympathetic treatment: the poet *does* label them 'heathens' (*hæþenra* 179).⁵¹ In an uncharacteristically forthright passage early in the poem,⁵² he explicitly

48 Cf. C. Donahue, 'Beowulf and Christian Tradition: A Reconsideration from a Celtic Stance', *Traditio* 21 (1965), 55–116 at 60, 76; Orton, 'Burning Idols', 32.

49 These are my views, but the religious status of the poem's characters, and the nature and extent of its Christianity, are disputed topics. Discussions include M. A. Parker, *Beowulf and Christianity* (New York, 1987); P. Cavill, 'Christianity and Theology in Beowulf', in P. Cavill (ed.), *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching* (Cambridge, 2004), 15–39. Readers of this book, who might include practitioners of modern heathenry, should note that I do not use 'heathen' as a pejorative term; I use it simply in the sense 'non-/pre-Christian Germanic'. The same goes for 'pagan'.

50 See the notes on these expressions in *KB*. The latter expression stops unpresumptuously short of saying that Beowulf's soul actually attained eternal glory in heaven. However, after composing so much about the marvellous achievements and virtues of a hero eulogized as *monna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust* 'the most benevolent and kindest of men' (3181), the poet surely thought the scales should be weighted heavily in Beowulf's favour. On the Judaeo-Christian significance of the phrase *monna mildust*, see G. Wieland, 'Manna Mildost: Moses and Beowulf', *Pacific Coast Philology* 23 (1988), 86–93. Many interpretations have impugned or damned Beowulf partly in the mistaken belief that he was subject to the curse on the dragon's heathen hoard; see Cooke, 'Who Cursed Whom?'

51 Grendel is also branded a 'heathen' (852, 986), as is the dragon's cursed hoard (2216, 2276).

52 Some scholars deem this passage wholly or partly interpolated; see *KB*, 128; B. Slade, 'Untydras ealle; Grendel, Cain, and Vþra. Indo-European *śruti* and Christian *smrti* in Beowulf', *In Geardagum* 27 (2007), 1–32 at 10–11.

condemns the devil-worship resorted to by many Danes during the twelve years in which Grendel preyed on them almost like a recurring plague.⁵³

Pæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga,
 modes brecða. Monig oft gesæt,
 rice to rune, ræd eahtedon,
 hwæt swiðferhðum selest wære
 wið færgryrum to gefremmanne.
 Hwilum hie geheton æt hærgratrum
 wigweorþunga, wordum bædon
 þæt him gastbona geoce gefremede
 wið þeodþreaum — swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
 hæþenna hyht. Helle gemundon
 in modsefan, metod hie ne cuþon,
 dæda demend, ne wiston hie drihten God,
 ne hie huru heofena helm herian ne cuþon,
 wuldres waldend. Wa bið þæm ðe sceal
 þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
 in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan,
 wihte gewendan! Wel bið þæm þe mot
 æfter deaðdæge drihten secean
 ond to fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian! (170–88)

That was a great misery to the friend of the Scyldingas [i.e., Hroðgar], a grief of the spirit. *Many* often sat, powerful ones in council, considered what was advisable, what would be best for the strong-minded to do against sudden terrors. At times they made vows of idol-worship at hill(?)-temples, requested that the soul/demon-slayer bring them aid in their national distress—such was their custom, the hope of *heathens*. They brought to mind Hell, they did not acknowledge the Measurer, the Judge of Deeds, they did not accept the Lord God,⁵⁴ nor, indeed, did they know to praise the Helmet of the Heavens, the Ruler of Glory. Woe will be to the one who, through dire affliction, shall shove his soul into the fire's embrace, (who shall) not expect comfort, for anything to change at all! Well will it be for the one who, after his death-day, can seek the Lord and ask for protection in the Father's embrace!

53 For further thoughts on Grendel as a disease-demon, see Chapter 12.

54 On the interpretation of the verbs *cuþon* and *wiston*, both of which literally mean 'knew', in this passage, see Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf', 107–12.

To be sure, this is not explicitly a condemnation of the heinous sin of apostasy, but given the poem's otherwise sympathetic portrayal of the Danes, it is rather suggestive of the backsliding to heathenism that accompanied the plague in seventh-century England.⁵⁵ At any rate, it seems that here the poet is careful not to implicate Hroðgar, king of the Danes, in the devil-worship practised by *many* of his noblemen.⁵⁶ Unlike them, but like Beowulf, Hroðgar remains, in my view, a virtuous man throughout the poem, albeit one without direct knowledge of Christ.

As many scholars have observed, Hroðgar resembles an Old Testament patriarch.⁵⁷ This is an important resemblance, as salvation for such virtuous pre-Christians was believed to have been forthcoming through Christ's Harrowing of Hell at Easter. This was an apocryphal tradition, treated in various Old English texts, according to which Christ, having died on the Cross, descended to Hell where he redeemed virtuous pre-Christians from Satan's captivity. I (following others) am confident that the poet evokes this tradition during his hero's adventure in the Danish mere, which sees Beowulf first decapitate Grendel's mother and then behead Grendel himself. The Harrowing tradition is likely to have been of especial interest and comfort to Christian Anglo-Saxons concerned for the fate of heathen forebears, as it implicitly offered hope that virtuous people might be saved even if they had not known Christ.

Aspects of Beowulf's adventure in the mere and its aftermath are the focus of the present study, this being the episode that forms *Beowulf's* structural centre and represents a highlight in terms of drama and imagery. More specifically, the following pages investigate the nature of the two swords with which Beowulf attacked the monsters of the mere, the first of which, called Hrunting, failed in its task; they also aim to offer fresh insights into the mythological aspects of these monsters (and others, including the climactic dragon), of Beowulf himself and of the mere-episode in general. My prime interest, however, is in the second of these two swords, a huge weapon forged by giants but perhaps unnamed, which the hero discovered at the bottom of the mere and with which he beheaded both of the devilish giants who lived there. I argue that

55 See Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf', 118; Orton, 'Burning Idols', 9. It is noteworthy that even here, the poet mentions only God, in various ways, not Christ.

56 For a different view, see Orton, 'Burning Idols', 31.

57 E.g., J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', in C. Tolkien (ed.), *J. R. R. Tolkien: The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (London, 1983), 5–48 at 40.

this great weapon, which I henceforth call ‘the giant sword’,⁵⁸ held great significance for both Christians and heathens, and that a remarkable image of its blade ‘waning’ by a process of melting and burning in hot monster-blood (1605–17) is interpretable chiefly as a subtle symbol of the transition from Germanic paganism to Christianity.⁵⁹

That my principal concern with the giant sword is neither misplaced nor exaggerated is suggested not just by the wondrous nature of its blade’s demise. The sword is introduced in superlative terms when first spotted by Beowulf, whose discovery of it fulfils the will of God (1554–6), from whom it is evidently a divine gift:⁶⁰

Geseah ða on searwum sigeeadig bil,
 ealdsweord eotonisc, ecgum þyhtig,
 wigena weorðmynd. Pæt wæs wæpna cyst,
 buton hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer
 to beadulace ætberan meahte,
 god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.
 He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga,
 hreoh ond heorogrim, hringmæl gebrægd ... (1557–64)

He saw then among the armour a victory-eager bill [i.e., sword], a giantish old-sword, doughty in its edges, the pride of warriors. It was the choicest of weapons, except that it was more [i.e., larger] than any other man might bear into battle-play [i.e., battle], good and splendid/well-equipped,⁶¹ the work of giants.⁶² He seized then the ringed/chained/belted(?) hilt,⁶³ the champion of the Scyldingas,⁶⁴ savage and sword-grim, drew the ring-marked (sword) ...

58 It is not to be confused with Wiglaf’s *ealdsweord eotonisc* ‘giantish old-sword’ (2616) or Eofor’s *ealdsweord eotonisc* (2979). However, both these warriors are relatives of Beowulf, and the descriptions of their swords echo that of the giant sword.

59 Cf. E. John, ‘Beowulf and the Limits of Literature—II’, *New Blackfriars* 52 (1971), 196–200 at 196: ‘My instinct tells me that the mysterious and fallible swords Beowulf used in his fights have an important significance not yet elucidated, but I do not think we shall ever know what it is.’

60 See K. Gould, ‘Beowulf and Folktale Morphology: God as Magical Donor’, *Folklore* 96 (1985), 98–103.

61 *Geatolic* ‘splendid’, ‘well-equipped’, ‘ready’ probably puns on ‘Geat-ly’, which would make the sword ideal for Beowulf.

62 A pun on *giganta weorc* ‘giants’ affliction/pain’ is conceivable.

63 See *DOE* s.v. *fetel-hilt*.

64 For this interpretation, see A. Reider, ‘On the Epithet *freca Scyldinga* for Beowulf, a Geat (*Beowulf*, line 1563b)’, *N&Q* 62 (2015), 185–8. *Scyldingas* ‘Shieldings’ was the name of the Danish royal house.

More details about the giant sword emerge later in Beowulf's speech to Hroðgar upon returning from the mere. Beowulf reports: *on wage geseah wlitig hangian / ealdsweord eacen* 'I saw hanging beautiful on the wall [of the monsters' lair] an increased⁶⁵ old-sword' (1662–3), a *hildebil* 'battle-bill' (1666), a *brogdenmæl* 'wavy-patterned object [i.e., a sword with a pattern-welded blade]' (1667).

Additionally, after the sword's blade has melted away, when Beowulf presents its hilt to Hroðgar we hear that it is *gylden* 'golden' (1677), the *enta ærgeweorc* 'early/ancient work of giants' (1679), the *wundorsmīpa geweorc* 'work of wonder-smiths' (1681). The passage containing these details merits quotation in full for its threefold repetition of the sword's presentation, a rhetorical technique that produces a sharpening of focus and a slackening of pace analogous to a slow-motion close-up repeated from slightly different angles. It is indicative of an event of great importance and solemnity:⁶⁶

Ða wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince,
 harum hildfruman on hand gyfen,
 enta ærgeweorc. Hit on æht gehwearf,
 æfter deofla hryre, Denigea frean,
 wundorsmīpa geweorc. Ond þa þas worold ofgeaf
 gromheort guma, Godes onsaca,
 morðres scyldig, ond his modor eac,
 on geweald gehwearf woroldcyninga
 ðæm selestan be sæm tweonum,
 ðara þe on Scedenigge sceattas dælde. (1677–86)

Then the golden hilt [or 'Golden Hilt'?), the ancient work of giants, was given into the hand of the old man, the hoary battle-chief. It, the work of wonder-smiths, passed [or, better, 'returned'?),⁶⁷ after the fall of devils [i.e., Grendel

65 I.e., supernaturally fortified (probably); see B. Moore, 'Eacen in Beowulf and Other Old English Poetry', *ELN* 13 (1976), 161–5; J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*, ed. C. Tolkien (London, 2014), 302. Similarly, Beowulf beheaded Grendel's mother with the *eacnum ecgum* 'increased edges' of the giant sword (2140). I return to the term *eacen* in Chapter 16.

66 On the importance of weapon-giving in the poem, see D. C. Van Meter, 'The Ritualized Presentation of Weapons and the Ideology of Nobility in Beowulf', *JEGP* 95 (1996), 175–89.

67 *DOE* s.v. *gehweorfan* records the sense 'to return' with reference to persons especially. But since, as we shall see in Chapter 3, the giant sword was conceptually an animate, sentient extension of Beowulf's arm, this sense may be entertained here.

and his mother?], into the possession of the Danes' lord. And when the fierce-hearted man, God's enemy [i.e., Grendel], guilty of murder, gave up this world—and his mother, too—it passed [or 'returned?'] into the control of the best of world-kings between the two seas, of those who distributed treasures in Skåne [i.e., the Danish realm].

No less arresting, in a different way, is the poet's subsequent description of the giant sword's hilt as Hroðgar beheld it:

hylt sceawode,
 ealde lafe, on ðæm wæs or writen
 fyrngewinnes — syðþan flod ofsloh,
 gifen geotende, giganta cyn,
 frecne geferdon; þæt wæs fremde þeod
 ecean dryhtne; him þæs endelea
 þurh wæteres wylm waldend sealde.
 Swa wæs on ðæm scennum sciran goldes
 þurh runstafas rihte gemearcod,
 geseted ond gesæd, hwam þæt sword geworht,
 irena cyst, ærest wære,
 wreopenhilt ond wrymfah. (1687–98)

He examined the hilt, the old leaving/heirloom, on which was inscribed the origin of ancient strife—then the Flood, the pouring sea, slew the race of giants (they fared [or 'behaved?'] terribly); that people was estranged from the eternal Lord; for that the Ruler gave them end-reward through water's surging. Thus it was on the guards/hilt-plates(?) of shining gold by means of rune-staves [i.e., runic letters] rightly marked, set down and said, for [less likely, 'by']⁶⁸ whom that sword was first wrought, the choicest of irons, with wrapped hilt and worm-patterning.

This complex passage has been the subject of much scholarly debate.⁶⁹ For now, it is sufficient simply to note the poet's emphasis on the hilt,

68 See *KB*, 213. In my view, this passage does not indicate that the hilt was inscribed with the name of the sword's original owner or maker, as some scholars assume.

69 See especially S. H. Horowitz, 'The Sword Imagery in *Beowulf*: An Augustinian Interpretation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of New York at Binghamton, 1978), 113–31; M. Osborn, 'The Great Feud: Scriptural History and Strife in *Beowulf*', *PMLA* 93 (1978), 973–81 at 977–8; A. J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, 1990), 184–9; R. J. Schrader, 'The Language on the Giant's Sword Hilt in *Beowulf*', *NM* 94 (1993), 141–7; M. R. Near, 'Anticipating Alienation: *Beowulf* and the Intrusion of Literacy', *PMLA* 108 (1993), 320–32; J. I. McNelis III, 'The Sword Mightier than the Pen? Hrothgar's Hilt,

evasiveness about the precise nature of the inscription, and reticence about the identity of the sword's original owner. The sword impresses as a unique weapon of great importance, one probably linked to Judaeo-Christian tradition and divine retribution against giants.

Suggestive evidence that the giant sword may have left such an impression on at least one Anglo-Saxon who knew the poem comes immediately after *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex. It appears that *Beowulf* was originally the last text in this manuscript, but since at least some time after 1731, when the manuscript was first foliated, it has been followed by an acephalous text of another Old English poem about the Biblical heroine Judith, this text having been written by the same scribe who recorded the last twelve-hundred-odd lines of *Beowulf*. Whether or not *Judith* was originally the first poem in the Nowell Codex, as some have suggested, it may be no coincidence that the highlight of this version of her story sees Judith, fortified by divine courage, behold the devilish heathen general Holofernes as he lay dead drunk on his bed using a sword apparently discovered in his abode (a description much expanded from the Biblical account), and then take his head to the shining city of Bethulia.⁷⁰ This parallels Beowulf's use of the giant sword to decapitate the lifeless heathen Grendel on his bed, followed by the hero's departure for the shining hall of Heorot along with the giant's head.⁷¹

For me, though, it is the extended image of the blade's melting—not paralleled in Judith—that impresses most. As we shall see in full,

Theory, and Theology', in M. J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (ed.), *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely', Papers in Honour of E. G. Stanley* (Abingdon, 1996), 175–85; D. Cronan, 'The Origin of Ancient Strife in *Beowulf*', *North-Western European Language Evolution (NOWELE)* 31–2 (1997), 57–68; M. Sharma, 'Metalepsis and Monstrosity: The Boundaries of Narrative Structure in *Beowulf*', *SP* 102 (2005), 247–79; A. Seiler, 'The Function of the Sword-Hilt Inscription in *Beowulf*', in S. Chevalier and T. Honegger (ed.), *Words, Words, Words: Philology and Beyond. Festschrift for Andreas Fischer on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Tübingen, 2012), 181–97; T. Birkett, *Reading the Runes in Old English and Old Norse Poetry* (Abingdon, 2017), chapter 1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603780>; D. Cronan, 'Hroðgar and the Gylden Hilt in *Beowulf*', *Traditio* 72 (2017), 109–32.

70 See M. Griffith (ed.), *Judith* (Exeter, 1997); T.-A. Cooper, 'Judith in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in K. R. Brine, E. Ciletti and H. Lähnemann (ed.), *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, 2010), 169–96 at 178–80.

71 Given that I go on to compare Beowulf to Skírnir, the implicitly radiant emissary of the Norse god who commanded the sun and the world of elves, it may also be noteworthy that Judith is described as *ælfscinu* 'elf-bright' (14).

the poet describes how the blade of the giant sword, which I believe to be radiant with sunlight, waned (i.e., dwindled) *hildegicelum* ‘with battle-icicles’ (presumably semi-molten strands of iron), and declares it a *wundra sum* ‘great wonder’ that it melted *ise gelicost* ‘just like ice’ (1606–7). It is this image that forms my study’s point of departure and return.

This book has two main parts between the present Introduction and the Conclusion.

Part I, comprising Chapters 2, 3 and 4, examines medieval descriptions of swords in terms of ice/icicles, candles and crosses in an attempt to interpret symbolic aspects of Beowulf’s image of the melting giant sword, which I suggest allude to prominent symbols of Easter.

Chapter 2 begins by surveying previous scholars’ comments on this image, which in my view fail to explain it adequately. I then adduce descriptions of swords in terms of ice and icicles in later Old Norse skaldic poetry, which, notably, seem most significant for their differences to the giant sword’s melting.

Chapter 3 argues that an important aspect of the image may have been overlooked—namely that the melting giant sword is implicitly likened to a burning wax candle. I find other radiant ‘candle-swords’ in medieval Irish and Norse texts, though none that melt. Especially significant may be an instance from the Old Norse *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* ‘Saga of Hjálmpér and Ölvir’: a ‘corpse-candle’ called Snarvendill in the possession of a monstrous female called Vargeisa. Vargeisa appears analogous to Grendel’s mother, and she yields the ‘corpse-candle’ to a hero called Hjálmpér who seems comparable to Beowulf. Also noteworthy is the ‘candle’ of another monstrous Norse female, Grýla, who likewise appears comparable in many respects to Grendel’s mother. Grýla’s ‘candle’ is actually a large icicle, which might also have been conceptualized as a sword. Her ‘icicle-candle’ does not represent a wholly satisfactory parallel to Beowulf’s candle-sword that melts like icicles, but it nonetheless merits consideration in this context. Finally, I suggest a Christian dimension to the image of the giant sword as a symbol of both the sun and a candle, perhaps even the traditionally large Paschal Candle. If present, this dimension exists very subtly—I stress that the poet’s technique throughout appears allusively symbolic, not mechanically allegorical.

Chapter 4 continues to investigate the symbolism of the giant sword. I suggest that this weapon, both before its melting and especially after being reduced to its golden hilt, may well also intimate the other principal symbol of Easter, namely the Cross of Christ.

Part II, comprising Chapters 5 to 15, investigates further the possible Anglo-Saxon and Norse mythical background to, and the significance of, Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, the giant sword and Hrunting. Likely celestial aspects of these swords, Beowulf, Grendel, Grendel's mother, and of other aspects of the mere-episode and the broader poem—together with many of its analogues—are revealed in this part of my investigation. I examine evidence, much of it comparative, from five main groups of sources: *Beowulf* itself; preceding Old English texts in Cotton Vitellius A.xv; analogous Anglo-Saxon texts in other manuscripts; comparable episodes in medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian texts, especially Old Norse poems and sagas; and, more controversially, Finnish folk-poetry recorded in the nineteenth century. Additionally, I refer to one of the Grimm Brothers' fairy tales and to an evocative English folk-tale from Lincolnshire. If *Beowulf* recedes from focus for periods during Part II, and my argument therefore appears somewhat etiolated, I request the reader's patience while I examine analogous texts in order to gather comparative evidence to support my proposals about *Beowulf*. It is my hope, too, that the intrinsic interest of these texts will itself sustain the reader's attention.

Chapter 5 addresses the question of who may be the rightful owner of the giant sword. I argue that there is reason to think that this giant-made weapon was originally the possession of a righteous solar deity, from whom Grendel stole or arrogated it, quite possibly with his mother's approval. If this was the case, the monsters' motivation probably combined a desire for self-protection with a lust for sunlight. I adduce a parallel in the theft of the lightning-hammer of Þórr, the Norse thunder-god, and highlight the recurrent theme of thievery in *Beowulf*. I end this chapter with remarks on the basis for detecting Germanic myth in the poem.

Chapter 6 investigates the potential significance of two of Hroðgar's grand titles. They indicate that his people were devotees of a god or demigod called *Ing*, the only pagan divinity named (clearly at least) in the poem. He appears equatable with the better-known god *Ingvi*

Yngvi-Freyr, or simply *Freyr*, of Norse mythology. I acknowledge that it is arguable whether much significance for the meaning of *Beowulf* may be read into Hroðgar's *Ing*-titles, but pursue the possibility that it may. Hroðgar, I tentatively suggest, was *Ing*'s human representative, possibly even, as *frea* 'lord', his incarnation. Examination of the (admittedly scant) Old English evidence for *Ing* raises the possibility that he was a god of heavenly light, who perhaps ploughed his land and sowed his crops by night as the constellation Boötes, before growing them by day as the sun-god. Also examined is evidence suggesting that Hroðgar may have given an ancestral sword of *Ing* to *Beowulf*, who subsequently wielded it as king of the Geats.

Chapter 7 focuses on *För Skírnis* 'Skírnir's Journey', an Old Norse Eddic poem about the quest undertaken by Skírnir, Freyr's emissary, to win for his master a radiant giantess called Gerðr. I argue that this poem contains a series of overlooked parallels to *Beowulf*'s mere-episode. Examination of correspondences between these texts, supplemented by other Old Norse accounts, suggests that, despite ostensible differences, they may preserve variants of much the same underlying myth. It seems especially significant that Gerðr appears situated, like Grendel's mother, in a fire-enclosed environment both marine and terrestrial, and that the texts' similarities extend to the weapons used by their heroes. Here Freyr's sword seems to correspond principally to Hrunting, while a mysterious twig-weapon called a (or the) *gambanteinn*, which Skírnir wields subsequently, appears to parallel principally the giant sword; in both poems the distinction between the two weapons is somewhat blurred. Parallels in *Hjálmþés saga* corroborate Gerðr's close association with the sea and point to another manifestation of the idea that a monstrous female, analogous to Grendel's mother, greedily took temporary possession of Snarvendill, a blade comparable to the giant sword. Finally in this chapter, I examine a curious passage from a twelfth- or thirteenth- century English chronicle which might have some bearing on matters.

Chapter 8 turns to *Svipdagsmál* 'The Lay of Svipdagr', a more neglected Old Norse mythological poem (or rather poems). Its hero's quest to claim a sun-like maiden is rather suggestive of Skírnir's quest for Gerðr. My examination uncovers, among other things, a giantess called Sinmara who guards another remarkable twig-weapon, called

Lævateinn, beneath a ‘milling’ maelstrom. Sinmara appears analogous to Grendel’s mother, who similarly possessed the giant sword beneath turbulent, grasping waters. Additionally, Lævateinn appears to have been concealed beneath the whirlpool by the arch-thief Loki, who had plucked it—doubtless illicitly—from what was probably a radiant branch of the world-tree. This encourages the suspicion that the giant sword was also a stolen solar weapon. Other parallels suggest that Lævateinn, like the *gambanteinn*, bears some relation to the mistletoe-weapon which slew the god Baldr. I conclude this chapter by adducing comparable whirlpool-giantesses in other Old Norse sagas.

Chapter 9 describes the solar attributes of Freyr and the likely purifying function of Skírnir and his weaponry. I advance parallels between Beowulf’s cleansing of Heorot with the giant sword and, following that sword’s melting, his purification of the mere and the implicit arrival of the thawing sun in springtime.

Chapter 10 continues to examine the mythology of Freyr by focussing on his connection with the stag. Freyr, having lost his sword, used an antler to slay a giant. Since he was shining when he did so, his antler may well have been solar. Comparably, Hroðgar is associated with the stag through his lordship of, and implicit identification with, his hall *Heorot* ‘Hart’, which shone in a manner suggestive of the sun. An identification of Hroðgar with a stag hunted by hounds and with an antler-hilted(?) sword—the giant sword—hidden in Grendel’s mere is implied by a punning passage describing a stag-hunt shortly before Beowulf enters the mere. In support of these suggestions, I adduce evidence for the concept of a solar stag more widely in early Europe, along with Old Norse myths about the hunting and devouring of the sun by wolfish lunar eclipse-monsters. These, I argue, may include an old female giantess and her son, a pitchfork-wielding wolf-troll, in the Eddic poem *Völuspá* ‘The Prophecy of the Seeress’, and the earliest surviving detailed depiction of Ragnarök, the Norse apocalypse, carved on the Viking Age Gosforth Cross in Cumbria, England. Also significant may be traditions about the folkloric Man in the Moon, who stole twigs—originally, I suggest, *beams* of sunlight.

Chapter 11 continues the theme of moon-creatures as thieves of sunlight by analyzing an Old English riddle. *Riddle 29* of the *Exeter Book* describes how a horned creature made off with sunlight and concealed

this booty in its home, until another creature arrived on the scene and reclaimed its possession. The two creatures are identifiable most immediately as a crescent moon and the morning sun. I argue that they bear comparison to Grendel and Beowulf, respectively.

Chapter 12 aims to provide further evidence for the treatment of this basic mythic theme in Old English poetry by venturing a related interpretation of the obscure metrical charm *Wið dweorh* 'Against a Dwarf'. I argue that the incantatory section of this text describes the arrival of a sun-deity or solar emissary to reclaim a radiant draught-horse, which by night had taken the form of (or been possessed by) a lunar dwarf and concealed itself (or been hidden) inside the skull of a human, who consequently suffered a convulsive fever. The sun-god or a solar emissary harnessed this errant dwarf-horse, which may also have had a cervine aspect, to his chariot and then journeyed into the sky, perhaps over the cooling sea, with the result that the patient's fever cooled. Again, the argument is bolstered by parallels in Old English and Old Norse literature. Especially noteworthy for the appreciation of *Beowulf* may be correspondences between the dwarf's invasion and occupation of a human's head and Grendel's invasion and occupation of Heorot, which caused Hroðgar mental suffering.

Chapter 13 attempts to interpret two obscure stanzas concerning a buried, probably solar, antler in *Sólarljóð* 'The Song of the Sun', an Old Norse poem which refers explicitly to a solar stag. I endeavour to interpret them on two levels—Christian and heathen Germanic—and relate them to the mere-episode of *Beowulf*. My Christian interpretation sees the antler, which is recovered by God from a dwarf (probably), as a symbol of the Cross, perhaps also of the souls of the righteous in Hell. From a Germanic perspective, these stanzas may represent another recreation of a heathen myth about a lunar creature's illicit concealment of sunlight and its repossession by a sun-god or his emissaries. It is of considerable interest, too, that the solar antler comparable to the radiant giant sword is probably associated with Freyr's close relatives. Furthermore, the identity of those relatives may indicate that the solar antler was once, like the giant sword, submerged beneath the waves.

Chapter 14 marshals evidence to strengthen the possibility that Grendel and his mother are, like analogous characters adduced earlier, creatures identified with the moon, especially during its waning or dark

phase. This evidence, which also raises the possibility of a similar lunar nature for the poem's climactic dragon, comes from preceding texts in Cotton Vitellius A.xv; one of the Grimms' fairy tales; a Lincolnshire folk-tale about the 'dead' moon; the language of *Beowulf* itself, including its use of *wan/won* and *wanian* (words of 'waning') and of *nið*, a noun which, I suggest, sometimes refers to the waning or dark phase of the moon;⁷² the Old Norse revenant *Glámr* as an analogue of Grendel; further examples of Old Norse lunar giantesses comparable to Grendel's mother; and more general congruences between Grendel and his mother and traditions about the moon in world mythology. This long chapter aims to demonstrate the widespread presence of lunar creatures in Germanic literatures and thereby increase the likelihood that they may inhabit *Beowulf*, too. If I am correct, the most important findings of this chapter are that Grendel's mother and her son may well be previously unrecognized counterparts of *Völuspá's* old female giantess and her son, the sun-seizing lunar pitchforker (himself akin to the Man in the Moon)—and that, if *Beowulf's* climactic fire-drake equates to the dragon *Niðhoggr* 'Waning/Dark-Moon Striker' of *Völuspá*, then all three of the Old English poem's main monsters find parallel, in the same order, in the most admired poem of Old Norse mythology.

Chapter 15 examines the *Beowulf*-poet's description of Grendel's mother as a 'sword-greedy she-wolf' of the sea. I propose that this characterization may identify her, if only fleetingly, as a wolfish fish, perhaps specifically a pike, with an appetite for swords of heavenly light. This idea finds parallel more or less closely in Finnish accounts of a pike's swallowing of a spark of heavenly fire or of golden eggs from which the sun was formed; in Old Norse accounts of pike that swallowed, or trembled on, swords analogous to *Beowulf's* giant sword; in a sun-devouring (and possibly solar-staff-swallowing) wolf-serpent on the Gosforth Cross; in ancient dragons such as the Babylonian Tiamat and Indian *Vṛtra*; and in the Christian identification of Hell as the mouth of a monstrous sea-creature.

My conclusion, in Chapter 16, reviews some of the key proposals of this study, which it supplements with fresh information and interpretation.

72 For an illustrated overview of the moon's phases, see E. C. Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon: Myths and Legends of the Sun, Moon, Stars, and Planets* (New York, 1991), 54–7.

Myths encapsulated in *For Skírnis* and *Svipdagsmál* are further elucidated, the former especially by a new interpretation of the *gambanteinn*—a weapon analogous, in my view, to the giant sword—as essentially a ‘twig of tribute’. Such a twig, I argue, may well be represented, beside solar and lunar symbols, on the pommel of a sword-hilt bearing decoration in Anglo-Saxon style from Bedale, North Yorkshire, England. I re-emphasize the possible association of the giant sword with Ing/Yngvi-Freyr and his circle, and tentatively venture an explanation of its relationship—and fundamental consubstantiality—with Hrunting as a solar symbol. I end by offering my thoughts on the possible significance for an interpretation of *Beowulf* of the waning giant sword as a thought-provoking, inspiring symbol of transformative conversion.

Before proceeding with Part I, some observations on my general approach may be in order.

As much of this study interprets key aspects of *Beowulf*’s ‘three great fights’ from the perspective of solar and lunar mythology, it may appear old-fashioned or quaint to those familiar with trends in scholarly approaches both to this poem and to early literature in general. Interpretations in light of nature mythology have been out of vogue since the nineteenth century.⁷³ In particular, the sun has long since set on the ‘school’ of solar mythology associated with scholars such as Max Müller.⁷⁴ Many such interpretations are deemed to have suffered, not so much from their confidence in the presence of solar themes *per se*, but from their imposition of a preconceived mythological theme or pattern, their working toward ‘a predestined goal’.⁷⁵ I have tried to avoid repeating this error by grounding my arguments as closely as possible

73 See the survey of scholarship in J. D. Niles, ‘Myth and History’, in Bjork and Niles, *Beowulf Handbook*, 213–32. Karl Müllenhoff, for example, saw Grendel as a god or demon representing the wild North Sea at the time of the spring equinox, and the fire-dragon as a manifestation of the harsh weather of autumn; see T. A. Shippey and A. Haarder (ed.), *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (Abingdon, 1998), 283–6. The scholarly tide may, however, be turning again with the rise of ‘ecocriticism’. Recently, Gräslund, in *Beowulfkvädet*, has proposed that *Beowulf*’s main monsters and their surroundings represent aspects of climatic upheaval in Scandinavia, and its consequences for humanity, during the years 536–50 AD.

74 See R. M. Dorson, ‘The Eclipse of Solar Mythology’, *JAF* 68 (1955), 393–416. For a sympathetic summary of Müller’s work, see M. P. Carroll, ‘Some Third Thoughts on Max Müller and Solar Mythology’, *European Journal of Sociology* 26 (1985), 263–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003975600004446>

75 Dorson, ‘Eclipse’, 399.

in the words of *Beowulf* and, secondarily, its analogues, but whether I have consistently succeeded I must leave to the reader's judgement.

Although I base my ideas as far as possible in the wording of *Beowulf*, I stress that this poem was neither composed nor transmitted in a vacuum. This means that other surviving texts from Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland and Scandinavia may be relevant to its interpretation. *Beowulf* surely draws on a stock of oral Germanic traditions about the mytho-heroic past. Many, if not most, of these have no doubt been lost, but some probably survive, albeit in later, variant, recreated forms, in medieval Icelandic and Scandinavian texts, mostly of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Especially notable among these are Old Norse Eddic poems, the Old Norse *Prose Edda* of the Icelandic Snorri Sturluson (for which Eddic poems such as *Völuspá* and *För Skírnis* were major sources); numerous Old Norse sagas, and the Latin *Gesta Danorum* 'History of the Danes' of Saxo Grammaticus, all of which date from long after 700 in their surviving forms but are likely to contain themes and details stemming from earlier, heathen times.⁷⁶

I use such sources extensively, albeit diffidently, in the belief that their perceived analogues to *Beowulf* stand in significant, if as yet undefined, relationships to *Beowulf*.⁷⁷ If many of these texts draw on

76 For selections of analogues to *Beowulf* in English translation or synopsis, see KB, Appendix A; G. N. Garmonsway, J. Simpson and H. Ellis Davidson, *Beowulf and its Analogues* (London, 1968); Magnús Fjalldal, 'Beowulf and the Old Norse Two-Troll Analogues', *Neophilologus* 97 (2013), 541–53. Major studies are J. M. Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga, and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition* (New York and London, 1992); C. Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge, 2000); A. M. Bruce, *Scyld and Scef: Expanding the Analogues* (New York, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315860947>. For a survey of scholarship, see T. M. Andersson, 'Sources and Analogues', in *Beowulf Handbook*, 125–48. Examination of the full range of instances of 'The Bear's Son' type of folktale, of which the first half of *Beowulf* contains the earliest example, is beyond the scope of this study. Its essential features, including a huge or magical sword (comparable to the giant sword) with which the second of two monsters is dispatched, are summarized in J. McKinnell, 'The Fantasy Giantess—Bran in *Hálfðanar saga Brønufostra*', in A. Ney, Á. Jakobsson and A. Lassen (ed.), *Fornaldarsagaerne, Myter og virkelighed—Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Nordurlanda* (Copenhagen, 2009), 201–22 at 203; see also J. M. Pizarro, 'Transformations of the Bear's Son Tale in the Sagas of the Hrafnistumenn', *Arv* 32–3 (1976–7), 263–81.

77 That many of the names in these analogues are very different from those of *Beowulf* need not be perturbing. J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (New York, 1974), for example, shows how the same basic myth may be attached to differently named personages and different places in different cultures at different times.

the same or a similar stock of traditions (stories, narrative-patterns and themes) as *Beowulf*, some may reflect direct or indirect knowledge of *Beowulf* (whether in its surviving version, or something close to it, or in the form of Gräslund's proposed earlier, Nordic *Beowulf*). This second possibility seems likely for the most famous analogues, which appear in the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* 'Saga of Grettir Ásmundarson', and for some others discussed below.⁷⁸ Some of the analogous texts may do both. Then again, some may be new stories whose authors independently employed common mythological symbols—swords, candles, crosses, giants, etc.—in similar ways to *Beowulf* to describe the same, repeating natural phenomena. As such, whatever the complicated nature of the relationships involved, I assume that study of such texts may, in one or more ways, usefully inform an interpretation of *Beowulf*, and vice versa. Most *Beowulf*-scholars probably share this assumption, although it has not gone unchallenged with regard to *Grettis saga*.⁷⁹ Should it ever be disproved (as seems improbable), the present study would be considerably weakened. Nevertheless, I believe sufficient evidence from Anglo-Saxon sources would remain for some of my findings about *Beowulf* to remain tenable.

By emphasizing the capacity of myths, mythological themes and mythic symbols to endure and recur over time,⁸⁰ I acknowledge that much of this book swims against the tide of modern academic literary

78 One analysis of the nature of the relationship of *Grettis saga* to *Beowulf* concludes: 'In the present state of our knowledge, the simplest explanation ... is that the author of the saga was familiar with the poem or the tradition to which it belonged'; R. M. Scowcroft, 'The Irish Analogues to *Beowulf*', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 22–64 at 64. For the likelihood that work by another, later Old English author came to be used in medieval Iceland, see K. E. Gade, 'Ælfric in Iceland', in J. Quinn, K. Heslop and T. Wills (ed.), *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007), 321–39. For thoughts on the possible relationship between *Grettis saga* and the early twelfth-century Anglo-Latin *Gesta Herwardi* 'Exploits of Hereward', see A. Orchard, 'Hereward and Grettir: Brothers from Another Mother?', in J. Turco (ed.), *New Norse Studies: Essays on the Literature and Culture of Medieval Scandinavia* (Ithaca, 2015), 7–59.

79 See Magnús Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga** (Toronto, 1998). Magnús essentially argues that these texts' similarities are accidental, but note the critical reviews of his book by T. M. Andersson in *Speculum* 74 (1999), 739–41; A. Liberman in *alvissmál* 9 (1999), 115–7; H. O'Donoghue in *MÆ* 69 (2000), 119–20; and P. A. Jorgensen in *JEGP* 99 (2000), 91–5.

80 For a recent approach to mythology as a 'symbolic matrix', see Frog, 'Mythology in Cultural Practice'.

studies, which emphasizes the distinctive significance of individual texts in their own times, places and cultures. That focus stresses individual synchronic differences, the existence of which is indisputable and wholly worthy of research. For much of this book, though, I choose to investigate what the other side of the coin—the capacity of myth and symbolism, encapsulated in literature, art and archaeological artefacts, to display diachronic continuity and commonality—may tell us about early texts, especially the most famous Anglo-Saxon example, which I try to interpret in its own time, place and culture.

Finally, I acknowledge that my approach involves much speculation and uncertainty—far too much, I fear, for many scholars. It requires a reader willing to entertain, at length, the possibility that apparently distinctive correspondences, especially when patterned and clustered, between texts of different types, recorded in different places, at different times and in different (but related) languages, may be significant, not coincidental, and that certainty one way or the other is lacking. The fact that speculation is inevitable in such an endeavour (given the sparse, varied and obscure nature of many of the adduced sources, whose relationships, if any, to each other are often unknown) is unlikely to disarm scholars who require a stronger methodological basis for argument. The same may be said of my presentation of interpretations tentatively throughout, often with an intention to persuade or intrigue, rather than necessarily to convince. I nevertheless hope that many of my thoughts will justify this book's publication in the eyes of more lenient readers, some of whom might feel inclined to investigate this subject for themselves, and perhaps to correct or augment my findings.

PART I.

Ice, Candle and Cross

Images of the Giant Sword in *Beowulf*

2. The Giant Sword and the Ice

Arguably the most remarkable image in *Beowulf* appears soon after the hero beheads Grendel's mother with a single sword-stroke—itsself an extraordinary feat and a moment of genuine horror¹—and then decapitates her lifeless son in the giants' lair at the bottom of a Danish mere. After Beowulf is deserted by the Danes who had waited for his return at the water's surface, something remarkable happens to the blade of the golden-hilted giant sword with which he dispatched both monsters. As described from the poet's perspective:

Ʒa Ʒæt sweord ongan
æfter heaƷoswate hildegicelum,
wigbil, wanian; Ʒæt wæs wundra sum
Ʒæt hit eal gemealt, ise gelicost
ðonne forstes bend fæder onlæteð,
onwindeð wælrapas, se gewæld hafað
sæla ond mæla; Ʒæt is soð metod.
Ne nom he in Ʒæm wicum, Weder-Geata leod,
maðmæhta ma, Ʒeh he Ʒær monige geseah,
buton Ʒone hafelan ond Ʒa hilt somod,
since fage; sweord ær gemealt,
forbam brodenmæl; wæs Ʒæt blod to Ʒæs hat,
ættren ellorgæst se Ʒær inne swealt. (1605–17)

1 This point, which underlines the achievement of both Beowulf and the giant sword, is well made by G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*: Mutilation, Decapitation, and Unburied Dead', in E. Trehearne and S. Rosser (ed.), *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2002), 81–100, who notes: 'Decapitation in pitched battle is clearly unusual. Beowulf's feat in achieving this against Grendel's mother ... is a triumph of opportunism and speed: he sees a gigantic sword and acts fast. We must not underestimate it' (99).

Then the sword, the war-bill, after/because of the battle-sweat [i.e., blood], began to wane [i.e., diminish] with/into battle-icicles; it was a great wonder that it entirely [or 'all'] melted, just like ice when the Father, who has control of times and seasons,² loosens frost's bonds, unwinds well-ropes³ [i.e., ice covering deep pools]; that is the true Measurer. He [i.e., Beowulf], prince of the We(a)ther-Geatas,⁴ did not take in that dwelling more precious objects, although he saw many there, than the head and the hilt, shining with treasure; the sword[-blade] had earlier melted, the wavy-marked [blade] burnt up; the blood was hot to that extent, the alien visitor/spirit poisonous (to that extent) which died therein.

Later in the poem, Beowulf describes the blade's demise from his perspective, which lacks the poet's macrocosmic analogy and, indeed, any reference to ice. He simply informs Hroðgar how *þæt hildebil / forbarn brogdenmæl, swa þæt blod gesprang, / hatost heaþoswata* 'the battle-bill burnt up, the wavy-marked [blade], as the blood sprang out, hottest of battle-sweats' (1666–8).

The poet's image of the sword-blade *wanian* 'waning/diminishing',⁵ of how it *gemealt* 'melted' and *forbarn* 'burnt up', which occurs at the centre of the poem, is striking. In my view, these three verbs describe the same ongoing destructive event, as there is no indication that the blade burst into shards which only subsequently melted (the supposed shards then being what is meant by the term *hildegicelum* 'battle-icicles'). Unlike Beowulf's sword *Nægling* which, towards the end of the poem, *forbærst* 'burst apart' (2680) against the dragon's head, it seems clear that the giant sword did not break against the toughness of its two victims. Instead, it was a process of dissolution with a beginning—the blade *ongan* 'began' to wane—and a distinct end. It did not disintegrate instantaneously. Nor would it make sense for it to shatter in contact with

2 On the elusiveness of a precise translation for *sæla ond mæla*, see E. R. Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf as an Indo-European Epic: A Study in Comparative Mythology* (Lewiston, 2010), 261. He suggests that 'in good times and [other] times' might capture part of the meaning. In the context, other potentially relevant senses of *mæl* include 'mark', 'sign', 'cross', 'crucifix', 'armour', 'sword' and 'battle'.

3 Or 'whirlpool/pool-ropes' or 'slaughter/destruction-ropes'.

4 *Weder-Geatas* is usually translated 'Weather-Geats', but Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*, argues that in this term *weder* originally meant 'wether', the ram being a symbol of a Gotlandic people.

5 At the end of this study I suggest attributing celestial significance, among other things, to this waning.

a liquid. Rather, it seems clear that its iron blade gradually diminished by melting and burning in the monstrous blood's ferocious heat.⁶

Not only is this image of the blade's demise remarkable, it is surely highly significant as a *wundra sum* 'great wonder', which the poet equates, in an 'all but epic simile',⁷ with God's deliverance of the world and its waters from the icy grip of winter.⁸ But despite the image's centrality, length and evident importance, scholars have not, as Andy Orchard has noted, found a credible source for it.⁹ Nor, in my view, have they satisfactorily explained why, from the poet's perspective, the blade diminished 'with/into battle-icicles', as the following selective overview of their thoughts may demonstrate.

Prior Views on the Melting of the Giant Sword

More than one scholar has compared the melting of the giant sword's blade to that of the dragon which the hero Sigemund pierced with his sword earlier in the poem: *wyrm hat gemealt* 'the hot snake melted' or 'heat melted the snake' (897).¹⁰ This comparison has some merit,

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- 6 Although the precise interpretation of the passage *wæs þæt blod to þæs hat, / ætten ellorgæst* is uncertain, it seems most likely that the extraordinarily hot blood which melts the giant sword's blade is that of the fiery-eyed Grendel; see KB, 210. It should, however, be noted that the giant sword is explicitly bloodied only by decapitating Grendel's mother—*Sword wæs swatig* 'The sword was sweaty/bloody' (1569)—whose blood was presumably also abnormally hot, though perhaps less so than her son's.
- 7 S. Viswanathan, 'On the Melting of the Sword: *Wæl-rápas* and the Engraving on the Sword-Hilt in *Beowulf*', PQ 58 (1979), 360–3 at 361.
- 8 Cf. the wonder expressed by King Alfred at the sun's heat turning an *is-mere ænlic* 'unique ice-mere' to water in S. Irvine and M. R. Godden (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Boethius with Verse Prologues and Epilogues Associated with King Alfred* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2012), 342–3 (*Metre 28*, lines 59–64). Note also a passage from a late Anglo-Saxon homily describing how God worked a *mycel wundor* 'great wonder': *þær com heofonlic leoht to þam halgum martyrum, swa hat swa sunne scinende on sumere, and þæt is formealt on eallum þam mere and þæt wæter wearð awend to wynsumum baðe* 'there came a heavenly light to the holy martyrs, as hot as the sun shining in summer, and the ice melted away across all the mere and the water was turned into a pleasant bath'; W. W. Skeat (ed.), *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, EETS o.s. 76, 82, 94, 114 (London, 1966), I, 250 (ll. 195–9).
- 9 A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), 112.
- 10 F. H. Whitman, 'Corrosive Blood in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus* 61 (1977), 276; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 112; KB, xlvi, 210; Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 262. For an eighth-century Latin parallel to, or possible source for, this dragon's peculiar demise, see A. K. Brown, 'The Firedrake in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus* 64 (1980), 439–60 at 442–3, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf01513838>

especially as the dragon which later kills Beowulf breathes fire that seems likened to blazing swords.¹¹ But the Sigemund-episode makes no mention of a sword melting, or of icicles or ice.¹²

Scholars have also compared the blade's melting in hot monster-blood to references to the corrosive blood of horses and he-goats in Pliny the Elder's first-century *Naturalis Historia* 'Natural History' (28.41) and medieval bestiaries.¹³ A passage from the mid-seventh- to mid-eighth-century Anglo-Latin *Liber monstrorum* 'Book of Monsters', describing a beast whose poison is so potent that it melts the cutting edges of an iron weapon, has rightly also been highlighted.¹⁴ But, again, these parallels go only so far, as they make no mention of icicles or ice. Nor do the medieval Irish passages describing hot, corrosive blood adduced by Martin Puhvel.¹⁵ Nor, again, does a nineteenth-century Icelandic folktale about a marvellous scythe that melts like wax when held over a fire, which the same scholar says bears only a superficial resemblance to the melting of Beowulf's giant sword.¹⁶

Another proposed analogue, or even source, appears in the twelfth book of Virgil's *Aeneid*. It records that Aeneas' enemy, Turnus, his original sword having snapped, seized his charioteer's sword, which *glacies ceu futilis ictu dissiluit* 'like brittle ice, flew asunder at the stroke' (740–1).¹⁷ There is some similarity between this passage and the failure, though not fracture, of Hrunting in *Beowulf* (1522–8), followed by the icicle-like melting of the giant sword.¹⁸ But the fact remains that

11 See Chapter 14.

12 Nor do other instances of melting in the poem—those of human heads (1120); Beowulf's hall under dragon-fire (2326); and treasure, along with Beowulf's body (3011). Note too that Wiglaf's spirit *ne gemealt* 'did not melt' (2628) in the face of the climactic dragon.

13 Whitman, 'Corrosive Blood'.

14 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 111–2, 300–1. I return to it in Chapter 14.

15 M. Puhvel, 'The Melting of the Giant-Wrought Sword in *Beowulf*', *ELN* 7 (1969), 81–4; M. Puhvel, *Beowulf and Celtic Tradition* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1979), 39–44. Another medieval Irish text describes how the ornament on a burning sword melted in the heat generated by the sword's use, but there is no analogy with ice; J. H. Todd (ed.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: Wars of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London, 1867), 196–7.

16 Puhvel, *Beowulf*, 40. As I hope will become apparent in Chapter 3, however, this image may well parallel a key aspect of what was in the Anglo-Saxon poet's mind.

17 H. R. Fairclough (trans.), *Virgil: Aeneid VII–XII, Appendix Vergiliana*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000), 352–3.

18 Cf. also the closely following image of Turnus as a stag fleeing a hound with *Beowulf* 1367–72.

the charioteer's sword *shattered* against the armour of Vulcan worn by Aeneas—it did not melt in hot monster-blood. As with *Nægling*, shattering is a common fate of the overtaxed sword in heroic literature,¹⁹ but such a manner of destruction appears crucially different from the melting of the giant sword's blade after it had succeeded in delivering its blows. Andy Orchard, who proposed this analogue, acknowledges that 'as it stands the parallel might not seem very secure', but suggests that 'one need only imagine a variant text reading *dissoluit* ('dissolves') to provide a much better match'.²⁰ No such variant is known, however, and unless perhaps the armour of the fire-god Vulcan was supposed to be extraordinarily hot, ice identified as *futtillis* 'brittle'²¹ might be expected to shatter, rather than melt, under sudden violent contact.

Stephen Glosecki compares the giant sword's melting with words spoken by the reciter of an Old English metrical charm from the collection known as *Lacnunga* 'Remedies'.²² A patient having been pierced by a supernatural iron spearhead which remained in the body, the healer declares:

'Gif herinne sy isenes dæl,
hægtessan geweorc, hit sceal gemyltan!'

'If herein there should be a piece of iron, the work of a witch [or 'witches'],
it shall melt!'²³

This comparison has merit in that here we have a piece of iron weapon of supernatural make melting. It does not melt in blood, however; nor is there mention of ice. Also, the melting iron is here the cause of affliction, rather than the means of its relief.

Another scholar, Caroline Brady, adduces no comparable images of melting in Old English texts, but focuses on the kenning *hildegicelum*

19 See T. J. Garbáty, 'The Fallible Sword: Inception of a Motif', *JAF* 75 (1962), 58–9.

20 A. Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), 136.

21 C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879), s.v. This is the only instance of the sense 'brittle' cited therein for this word.

22 Glosecki, *Shamanism*, 136–7; see also S. F. Burdorff, 'Re-reading Grendel's Mother: *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charms', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 45 (2014), 91–103 at 98, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2014.0068>

23 Text and translation adapted from E. Pettit (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols (Lewiston, 2001), I, 92–3.

'with/into battle-icicles'.²⁴ She claims that the giant sword was probably *grægmæl* 'grey/silver-marked' (2682), and that this attribute, together with the polished nature of a pattern-welded sword-blade, enables us to 'envision the shimmering sheen of the blade as Beowulf raised it high and then, after he swung it down to cut off Grendel's head, we can also envision the fine steely iron melting into hoar-frosty splinters in the demonic blood hotter than the hellfire'. She adds: 'Obviously *-gicel* ['icicle'] is a metaphor, a conscious transfer—based on resemblance—from the primary referent, "splinters" of ice melting when spring comes, to another, "splinters of frosty steel," with which it is not essentially, even for the moment, identical, the two referents standing in different referential and semantic ranges.' But the term *grægmæl* is used only of the sword *Nægling* later in the poem, when, as we have noted, it shatters, rather than melts, against a dragon's skull. Also, splinters/shards result from shattering, not melting.

Alvin Lee similarly addresses the significance of *hildegicelum* without reference to other texts.²⁵ For him, this term, which would seem 'bizarre and far-fetched' in isolation, becomes explicable and 'singularly effective' when viewed in its verbal and narrative context.²⁶ The identification of melting blade and melting icicles is then seen to do a 'significant piece of strong poetic work,' and in *hildegicelum* 'a major pattern of meaning comes to its climax.'²⁷ Lee relates the *hilde-* 'battle' part to the preceding struggle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother and to the beheading of Grendel. He also observes that 'there is a kind of visual accuracy in the notion of the melting metal looking like melting ice, but there is more to the figure than that.'²⁸ He relates the *-gicelum* 'icicles' part to preceding references to the overtaking of the world by the winter associated with the depredations of Grendel. This monster, who existed in 'perpetual night' (*sinnihte* 161) and inhabited windswept headlands and a mere above which the skies wept and frost-covered trees bent, brought twelve winters (years) (*twelf wintra tid* 147) of misery

24 C. Brady, "'Weapons" in *Beowulf: An Analysis of the Nominal Compounds and an Evaluation of the Poet's Use of Them*, ASE 8 (1979), 79–141 at 102–3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0263675100003045>; see also Clemoes, *Interactions*, 100.

25 A. A. Lee, *Gold-Hall and Earth-Dragon: Beowulf as Metaphor* (Toronto, 1998), 66–70.

26 Lee, *Gold-Hall*, 66.

27 Lee, *Gold-Hall*, 66, 68.

28 Lee, *Gold-Hall*, 69.

upon the Danes of Heorot. It is this frosty rule, together with the wintry waters in which sea-monsters assailed Beowulf during his swimming contest with Breca, that the melting of the blade 'with battle-icicles' puts an end to: 'All this background, I suggest, prepares for the kenning *hildegicelum*. The battle fought by Beowulf on behalf of Heorot is a battle for life, living things, freedom of movement, and human joy against death, shadowy demonic beings, enslavement by powers of darkness, and the joylessness of a frozen world locked in wintry bonds.'²⁹

Daniel Anlezark has also contributed to the discussion: 'From fiery battle-blade the sword has been metaphorically changed into a cool battle icicle, a transformation that mimics the alternation of heat and cold used in a sword's manufacture, but furthermore deploying the seasonal image of melting ice to evoke the symbolic renewal of life that the destruction of the murderous Grendel-kin signals.'³⁰ I would qualify this observation by noting that, strictly speaking, the poet does not liken the giant sword to a *single* icicle, and that the plurality of *hildegicelum* is arguably suggestive of the multiple cold iron rods from which pattern-welded blades were made, an analogy perhaps encouraged by the first syllable of OE *isern* 'iron', which sounds the same as OE *is* 'ice'.³¹ It may be, therefore, that as the blade melts, it not only disappears but is figuratively unmade.³²

For Earl R. Anderson, *hildegicelum*, 'a nonce-compound, is the semantic center of gravity'³³ in 'the perfect simile'.³⁴ He adds that:

The poet fashioned this unique compound [i.e., *hildegicelum*] just for this one sword-blade, in an artistic act of morphological iconicity. The blade was *ise*

29 Lee, *Gold-Hall*, 70.

30 D. Anlezark, *Water and Fire: The Myth of the Flood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 2006), 310.

31 OE *isern* appears in *Beowulf* in the compounds *isernbyrne* 'iron mail-coat' (671) and *isernscur* 'iron shower (of arrows)' (3116), the latter in the context of burning coals and flame. The commoner form of the word in the poem as it has come down to us is *iren(n)*, however.

32 See also A. G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley, 1959), 21: '*hildegicel* ... was evoked by an imagination working in a manner resembling the processes of thought behind the skaldic kenning *diguljökull*, "ice of the crucible," for the concept "silver." As silver melts in the crucible, so ice melts in the sun. In *hildegicel* the thought is similar, but it is not concealed and strained as in the skaldic kenning; it is visualized and communicated in a clear and lovely image.'

33 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 262.

34 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 260.

gelicost, more like ice than any other object in the world could be, because no other sword-blade ever melted into a multiplicity of icicle-like strands.³⁵

Anderson also observes that ‘preternatural fire and icicles are apt images of hell’, and relates the sword’s melting to God’s release of waters in springtime.³⁶ In turn, he sees an ‘exact’ parallel in Indra’s freeing of the world’s waters by slaying the snake Vṛtra in Indian myth.³⁷ On this last basis ‘the simile opens the text [i.e., *Beowulf*] to a world of dragon-slaying myths’.³⁸

Most recently, the authors of the *Dictionary of Old English* declare that *hildegicelum* refers to ‘drops of blood dripping from a sword’.³⁹ But although this could be part of what the image evokes, it is not, I think, its focus, as the poet emphasizes that ‘it was a great wonder’ that the *sword* melted ‘just like ice’. In other words, the icicles were not principally drops of congealing monster-blood dripping from the blade—a sight which would not be especially noteworthy.

Although all these scholars have made useful observations, in my view there is much more to say about this image. In the rest of this chapter I highlight the image’s distinctiveness by comparison with ostensibly similar descriptions of ice- and icicle-swords in Old Norse texts. In Chapters 3 and 4 I go on to argue that the image may have important implications for the interpretation of *Beowulf* from a religious perspective, specifically with regard to symbols of Easter.

Old Norse Ice-Swords

To my knowledge, surviving Anglo-Saxon records contain only one image markedly comparable to that of the melting giant sword in *Beowulf*. However, as even this parallel in the Old English poem *Andreas* makes no reference to ice, I reserve it for the next chapter. Nor do we find sword-melting imagery in the many Old Norse analogues to *Beowulf* that scholars have adduced.

35 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 262.

36 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 262–3.

37 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 263. See also my Chapter 3.

38 Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 263.

39 DOE s.v. *hilde-gicel*.

What we do find, in Old Norse skaldic poems, is a frequent likening of swords to ice, and sometimes icicles,⁴⁰ given their obvious similarity in terms of coldness, sharpness and shape. Numerous examples follow, some of which were reportedly spoken on English soil, though all centuries later than a seventh- or eighth-century *Beowulf*. Significantly, despite some interesting similarities, they appear most helpful for the appreciation of the image of the melting giant sword because of their *differences* from it. They serve to highlight in considerable number, through contrast, the uniqueness of the Old English image, which strictly speaking concerns not an ice- or icicle-sword, but a sword that melts into icicle-like strands of semi-molten iron.

The Icelander Vígfúss Víga-Glúmsson (b. c. 955) called a sword *þunníss Gunnar* ‘slender ice of Gunnr [a valkyrie]’.⁴¹ For Hallvarðr Háreksblesi, an Icelandic skald (poet) at the court of King Knútr (Canute), a sword was *sikulgjarðar íss* ‘ice of the sword-belt/baldric’.⁴² A verse attributed to Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066 refers to *Hlakkar íss* ‘ice of Hlökk [a valkyrie]’.⁴³ In the thirteenth-century saga that bears his name, the Icelander Gísli Súrsson envisions himself brandishing a *hjaldríss* ‘battle-ice’,⁴⁴ a term that bears some resemblance to OE *hildegicelum*.

Unsurprisingly, Old Norse ‘ice-swords’, like any other type of sword, may be bloody, as was the giant sword when it melted. Thus, in the twelfth-century, Kolli inn þrúði declared *Lýsa munk, hvé ljósa / — laut hrafn í ben Gauta / ... sárísa rauð vísi* ‘I shall describe how ... the ruler reddened bright wound-icicles—the raven bent over the wounds of the Gautar [i.e., the Geatas of *Beowulf*]’.⁴⁵ Similarly, in a verse attributed to the eleventh-century Icelander Sigvatr Þórðarson a warrior is called an *íss gunnrjóðr* ‘war-reddener of ice’.⁴⁶ An anonymous stanza describing

40 R. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn, 1921), 151–2.

41 D. Whaley (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1, SPSMA 1* (Turnhout, 2012), 363. Translations from Old Norse texts are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

42 *SnESkald*, I, 93.

43 K. E. Gade (ed.), *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2, SPSMA 2* (Turnhout, 2009), 55.

44 Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Vestfirðinga sögur, ÍF 6* (Reykjavík, 1943), 93.

45 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2*, 530–1.

46 Whaley, *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1*, 705–6.

an attack by King Knútr and his forces on London refers to the clanging of the *blóðíss* 'blood-ice'.⁴⁷

Skaldic designations of swords as specifically *jökla* 'icicles' or 'glaciers' (cognate with OE *-gicelum*) include one by Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, a jarl of Orkney in the twelfth century, who described swords as *þøðvar jökla* 'battle's icicles/glaciers'.⁴⁸ In the twelfth or thirteenth century, the Icelander Haukr Valdísarson identified blood as the *sárjökuls geimi* 'sea of the wound-glacier/ice/icicle'.⁴⁹ A stanza quoted in the final part of Snorri's thirteenth-century *Prose Edda* features a cluster of images of ice-swords steeped in a sea of blood, including a reference to swords as *styrjökla* 'battle-glaciers/icicles':

Álmdrósar skylr ísa
 ár flest meginbára sára,
 köenn lætr hræ[s] á hrønnum
 hjálmsvell jøfurr gella fella;
 styrjøkla kná stiklir,
 stinn, mens legi venja benja,
 lætr stillir frá frýlla
 fólk sund hjarar lunda unda.⁵⁰

The mighty wave of wounds [BLOOD] washes nearly every year the bow-woman's ice [VALKYRIE > SWORD]. The clever prince lets the helmet-floe [SWORD] resound hard on the fellers' waves [SWORDS > BLOOD]. The necklace-thrower [GENEROUS PRINCE] does accustom battle-glaciers/icicles [SWORDS] to the wound-sea, the swift ruler lets the sword-woods' [WARRIORS'] wound-sound [BLOOD] fill the stiff swords.⁵¹

Hertha Marquardt suggested that the association of a sword with icicles in *Beowulf*, taken together with the Old Norse parallels, might reflect an ancient Germanic sword-kenning more widely attested in Norse tradition.⁵² Rudolf Meissner, however, thought the similarity with

47 Whaley, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 1, 1025.

48 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, 590. Gade translates 'glaciers of battle'.

49 T. Möbius (ed.), *Islendingadrápa Hauks Valdísarsonar: ein isländisches gedicht des XIII. Jahrhunderts* (Kiel, 1874), 7, 38.

50 A. Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Edda: Háttatal* (Oxford, 1991), 26.

51 Adapted from A. Faulkes (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (Oxford, 1987), 201.

52 H. Marquardt, *Die altenglischen Kenningar: ein Beitrag zur Stilkunde altgermanischer Dichtung* (Halle, 1938), 12.

skaldic imagery purely fortuitous.⁵³ For her part, Roberta Frank detects here and elsewhere in *Beowulf* 'echoes of skaldic diction', but 'heard at a great distance, from outside the [skaldic] tradition, and recorded to supply a touch of Scandinavian color, to capture the flavor of the sixth-century Danish society described.'⁵⁴ But whatever the explanation of the similarities (to the extent that they are seen), a key *difference* stands out. Rather surprisingly, in none of the many Old Norse references to ice-swords I have found does such a weapon *melt* like an icicle or ice. Instead, Old Norse ice-swords may shatter, as in the twelfth-century Icelander Einarr Skúlason's phrase *folks brustu svell* 'the ice-sheets of battle [swords] burst'.⁵⁵ This key difference serves to underline the *Beowulf*-poet's assertion that 'it was a great wonder' that the giant sword melted like ice.⁵⁶

To comprehend more fully the image of the melting of the giant sword's blade, I believe we must appreciate another intimated parallel. It is one that finds corroboration in medieval Norse and Irish texts, but seems to have been overlooked by scholars in connection with the giant sword. It is between a sword and a wax candle.

53 R. Meissner, review of H. Marquardt, *Die altenglischen Kenningar: ein Beitrag zur Stilkunde altgermanischer Dichtung in Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 76 (1939), 30–34 at 31–2.

54 R. Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon Audiences Have a Skaldic Tooth?', *SS* 59 (1987), 338–55 at 343.

55 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, 554–5. There are also descriptions of Norse sword-blades breaking 'under the hilt', for which see H. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde* (Kristiania, 1914), 18.

56 Cf. Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 262.

3. The Giant Sword and the Candle

If no other sword in old Germanic literature melts like ice, an image found immediately after the giant sword beheads Grendel's mother and shortly before its blade melts encourages perception of another analogy. The blade's distinctive waning *hildegicelum* 'with/into battle-icicles' subtly invites correlation with *rodores candel* 'the sky's candle' (1572) because, it seems to me, the object most likely to have been identified metaphorically with melting icicles was a burning candle.¹ Admittedly, to my knowledge, Anglo-Saxon records contain no other instances of such an analogy, but given its specificity this is not surprising, and the basis for the comparison is obvious. When a wax candle is lit, icicle-like strands of molten wax—'waxicles', if you will—start growing downwards from its tip. Secondly, a traditional beeswax candle is itself white, elongated (perhaps tapered) and cool (except when lit), not unlike an icicle.² In addition, both a lit candle and an icicle are liable to burn those who touch them.

Although I have found no explicit or strongly implicit comparisons of swords to candles in other Anglo-Saxon texts, a passage from the Old English poem *Andreas* catches the eye. In this poem, from the tenth-century *Vercelli Book*, God saves a boy from death at the hands of monstrous heathens by commanding their swords to melt 'just like wax'. Scholars have detected enough verbal and thematic similarities between *Andreas* and *Beowulf* to indicate a close link between the two

1 See further the discussion of this solar image later in the present chapter.

2 With the *Beowulf*-poet's use of OE *wanian* 'to wane' to describe the sword's diminution (1607), compare the use of the verb's Middle English descendant in connection with a burning candle: see *OED* s.v. 'wane' v. I.1 (c. 1290); *MED* s.v. *wanen* 1 (a) (first entry).

poems.³ Especially if, as seems likely, *Andreas* was influenced by *Beowulf*, the simile, which I quote in context below, offers encouragement for the suggestion that the giant sword melted not just like icicles but also like wax:

Hine God forstod,
halig of hehðo, hæðenan folce;
het wæpen wera wexe gelicost
on þam orlege eall formeltan,
þy læs scyldhatan sceððan mihton,
egle ondsacan, ecga þryðum.
Swa wearð alysed of leodhete,
geong of gyrne. (1143–50)⁴

God stood up for him, holy from on high, against the heathen folk; he commanded the men's weapons all to entirely melt just like wax in that strife, lest the unjust oppressors/shield-haters, terrible adversaries, might harm (him) with the powers of edges/swords. Thus he became freed from people-hate, the young one from injury.

Irish and Norse texts certainly do attest to the medieval currency of the image of a sword as a candle. This analogy also has an obvious basis: both sword and candle are long and slender; a candle may taper, as does a sword at its tip; both shine when in use; both are dangerous to touch at the tip; and both are carried in the hand by a handle, potentially ornate.⁵ As with the Old Norse instances of ice-swords, however, the following examples of 'candle-swords' all postdate a seventh- or eighth-century *Beowulf*.

Medieval Irish tradition tells of the marvellous sword *Caladbolg* 'Hard Cleft(?)', described in the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* in the twelfth-century

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- 3 Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 163–6; R. North and M. D. J. Bintley (ed.), *Andreas: An Edition* (Liverpool, 2016), 62–81.
 - 4 K. R. Brooks (ed.), *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles* (Oxford, 1961), 37 (see also the note on p. 102); North and Bintley, *Andreas*, 179. The parallel is mentioned in W. P. Lehmann, 'Atertanum Fah', in W. W. Arndt, P. W. Brosman, Jr., F. E. Coenen and W. P. Friedrich (ed.), *Studies in Historical Linguistics in Honor of George Sherman Lane* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 221–32 at 228; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 164.
 - 5 Their likeness may even extend to an element of their composition, if, then as now, sword-blades or scabbards were sometimes coated in wax or tallow to prevent rust. A sword belonging to Charlemagne was protected by a scabbard, leather and white linen strengthened with *cera lucidissima* 'clearest wax'; see SASE, 93, 113.

Book of Leinster as shining like a *chaindil* ... *lassamain* 'blazing candle'.⁶ Similarly, another Irish tale, possibly composed before the mid-twelfth century,⁷ describes how the gold-hilted sword Cruaidin Coiditcheann 'Hard-Headed Steeling'—a treasured heirloom that belonged to the supernaturally hot hero Cú Chulainn—*rothaitnidh 'sin aidhchi amal coindill* 'shone at night like a candle'.⁸ Like OE *candel* 'candle', the medieval Irish word *caindel* 'candle' derives from Latin *candela*; it is a noun derived from Christian ritual.

Surviving candle-sword parallels in Old Norse texts appear more numerous and especially interesting.⁹ The thirteenth-century *Orkneyinga saga* 'Saga of the Men of Orkney' records that an Icelandic skald received as a gift *it bezta blóðkerti* 'the best blood-candle', which was *glæst með gulli* 'bright with gold';¹⁰ the surrounding prose identifies this gift as a spear, but the kenning would more normally describe a sword.¹¹ Here *-kerti* 'candle' probably derives ultimately from Latin *charta* 'papyrus',¹² in which case it is probably not a word from the Common Germanic, pre-Christian lexicon.

In the twelfth-century, probably Orcadian poem *Krákumál* 'Crow's Words', Ragnarr Lóðbrók, while dying in the snake-pit of the ninth-century King Ælla of Northumbria, recites a poem in which he describes a sword as a *rækyndill* 'corpse-candle'.¹³ Here *-kyndill* 'candle' derives, perhaps with influence from OE *candel*, from Latin *candela*.¹⁴

Again, a stanza from the twelfth-century Orcadian poem *Háttalykill* 'Key to Metres' includes the terms *hjaldrkyndill* 'battle-candle' and *hildar kerti* 'taper/candle of battle', both of which are 'sword'-kennings:

6 C. O'Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1970), 130, 266. The same sword may have been used by a lone hero to kill a water-monster in its lair; see D. A. Binchy, 'The Saga of Fergus Mac Léti', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 33–48.

7 V. Hull, 'Echtra Cormaic Maic Airt, "The Adventure of Cormac Mac Airt"', *PMLA* 64 (1949), 871–83 at 871.

8 W. Stokes, 'The Irish Ordeals, Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise, and the Decision as to Cormac's Sword', in W. Stokes and E. Windisch (ed.), *Irische Texte mit Übersetzungen und Wörterbuch*, Dritte Serie, 1. Heft (Leipzig, 1891), 183–229 at 199, 218.

9 See Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, 151.

10 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, 620.

11 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, 621; cf. Meissner, *Kenningar*, 146; LP s.v. *blóðkerti*.

12 ANEW s.v. *kerti* 1; ÍO s.v. *kerti* 1.

13 M. Clunies Ross (ed.), *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, SPSMA 8 (Turnhout, 2017), 730, 732.

14 ANEW s.v. *kyndill*.

Hjaldrkyndill beit hildar
 —harðr brandr es þat—garða;
 ljós varð høggs í hausum
 —hjør kallak svá—gjalla.
 Hart skar hildar kerti
 —hjalms grand es þat—randir;
 þvít benlogi brynju
 beit, nefnik svá hneiti.¹⁵

The battle-candle [SWORD]—a hard firebrand is that—bit the walls of battle [SHIELDS]; the light of the blow—I call the sword thus—had to yell in skulls. The hard taper of battle [SWORD]—the helmet’s ruin is that—sheared shield(-rim)s; because the wound-flame [SWORD] bit the mail-coat, I named it thus: ‘Cutter’.

Here *hjaldr*- ‘battle’ is synonymous with OE *hilde*- ‘battle’ in *Beowulf*’s *hildegicelum*. Its alliterative partner, *hildar* ‘battle’ (genitive of *hildir*), is cognate with OE *hilde*-. It is also of interest that, in this stanza, at least the second instance of *hildar* could also be interpreted as *Hildar* ‘of Hildir’. The fiery candle-sword would then belong to the valkyrie Hildir (compare the synonymous valkyrie-names *Gunnr* and *Hlökk* in the ‘ice-sword’ kennings quoted in Chapter 2). Some scholars detect characteristics of an early, unromanticized valkyrie in Grendel’s mother, in whose proximity Beowulf acquired the giant sword.¹⁶

Most interesting of all, however, is another medieval Norse text in which a candle-sword—another ‘corpse-candle’—appears in the possession of a supernatural female who appears comparable in many respects to Grendel’s mother. Parallels between the two texts raise the possibility, even likelihood, of a significant link between this candle-sword and the giant sword. They merit close examination as they seem not to have been noticed before.

15 Adapted from *PTP*, 1077.

16 See N. K. Chadwick, ‘The Monsters and Beowulf’, in P. Clemoes (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins* (London, 1959), 171–203 at 177; H. Damico, *Beowulf’s Wealththeow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, 1984), 46.

Vargeisa's Candle-Sword

In its surviving form *Hjálmþés saga* probably dates from the fifteenth century.¹⁷ Some of its stanzas may be older, though, and comparison with the late fourteenth-century Icelandic poems known as *Hjálmþés rímur* 'Hjálmþér's Rhymes' suggests the existence of an earlier form of the story 'probably composed around 1300'.¹⁸ The saga may, of course, contain traditions even earlier than that, whether transmitted through oral tradition or writing. The following paragraphs summarize relevant aspects of Hálmþér's story, based mainly on the saga.

The tale begins by introducing the parents of the eponymous hero, who appears comparable to Beowulf. Hálmþér's father was a famous king called *Ingi*—probably a late manifestation of a certain *Ing(v)i* who is a highly important character for this study.¹⁹

Of Ingi we learn that:

Hann var vel búinn maðr at öllum íþróttum, meiri ok mektugri, vænni ok vitrari, stærri ok sterkari en hverr annarr maðr í veröldinni honum samtíða. Hann lá í hernaði fyrra hlut ævi sinnar ok vann undir sik mörg konungaríki [ok voru honum skattgildir]. Hann átti at ráða fyrir Mannheimum, hvert er var öllum löndum meira ok gagnauðugra.²⁰

He was a well-appointed man in all accomplishments, (being) greater and mightier, handsomer and wiser, bigger and stronger than every other man in the world at the same time as him. He pursued raids for the earlier

17 For editions, see *FSN*, IV, 177–243; C. C. Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, 3 vols (Copenhagen, 1929–30), III, 453–518; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 489–539 (verses only). For an English translation from an unpublished manuscript text, see R. O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories & Romances* (Stroud, 2002), 65–102. On an analogue to this saga in the tenth-century Irish tale *Fingal Rónáin* 'Rónán's Kin-Slaying', see R. O'Connor, "'Stepmother Sagas": An Irish Analogue for *Hjálmþés saga ok Ólværs*', *SS* 72 (2000), 1–48.

18 P. Pulsiano and K. Wolf (ed.), *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia* (New York, 1993), 285. For the *rímur*, see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Rímna safn: samling af de ældste islandske rimer*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1905–22), II, 1–84.

19 At the end of the saga, Hálmþér also names his elder son Ingi.

20 *FSN*, IV, 179, with the bracketed text taken from Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 453 n. 1. For other late references to Ingi, see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Fernir fornislenskir rímna flokkar* (Copenhagen, 1896), 43–59 (*Völsungsrímur*); H. Hethmon, 'Völsungsrímur: A New English Translation with Commentary and Analysis' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Iceland, 2015), where he is a son of Óðinn. Also, for Ingi as a king of Constantinople in violent pursuit of a queen, see S. McDonald, 'Nítíða saga: A Normalised Icelandic Text and Translation', *LSE* 40 (2009), 119–45.

part of his life and subjugated to himself many kingdoms [and there were tribute-payments to him]. He had command over *Mannheimar* 'Man-Homes/Worlds',²¹ where it was greater and more productive than all (other) lands.

Ingi's queen was a gifted woman called *Marsibil* 'Sea-Sibyl', daughter of the king of Syria. To Ingi and his wife a son was born: *Hjálmpér* 'Helmet-Servant'. He was big, strong and handsome, the most accomplished of men from a young age. He became friends with Ölvir, the supremely accomplished son of an earl, the king's best friend.²² They became sworn brothers after a tournament in which Hjálmpér had rampaged *sem björn í sauðaduni* 'like a bear amid a flock of sheep'.²³

Marsibil died and Ingi grieved for her day and night, until one day a ship arrived over the sea bearing two people. One was an extraordinarily beautiful woman called *Lúða* 'She of the Mill-(Frame)/Whirlpool'.²⁴ She is later revealed to be a giantess, or at least a giant's sister. Ingi promptly married her in Hjálmpér's absence, but people considered her haughty and self-willed. They also wondered why a man soon began to disappear from their number each night.²⁵

Hjálmpér and Ölvir went on viking raids, during which the former killed two mighty foes, the brothers Koll and Toki. While fighting on a ship, Hjálmpér severed Toki's arm, whereupon Toki dived into the sea. Hjálmpér pursued him and they wrestled underwater for a long time, with each dragging the other to the bottom, until loss of blood sapped Toki's strength and Hjálmpér left him for dead. Hjálmpér then swam back to his ships, to the delight of his men. He considered he had returned *úr helju* 'from Hel/the dead'.²⁶

Later, after other adventures, Hjálmpér rejected his stepmother's sexual advances, whereupon she sank into the earth, whence she had

21 O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories*, 182 observes that this name was '[t]aken to mean "Sweden" by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedish editors, but not necessarily by Icelandic saga-authors'. In the *rímur* Ingi rules over Denmark.

22 The two appear largely equivalent, almost doubles—like the swords they acquire.

23 Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 455 n. 1. Cf. the name *Beowulf* interpreted as 'bee-wolf', i.e., 'bear'.

24 This, at least, is my interpretation of her name, the significance of which will become apparent later in this study when we meet other mill-(frame)/whirlpool-giantesses.

25 They were taken by the sexual predator *Lúða*. Cf. the nocturnal seizure of a single man, *Æschere*, by Grendel's mother.

26 *FSN*, IV, 188; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 463. C. N. Gould, 'The Source of an Interpolation in the *Hjalmtérs Saga ok Ölvis*', *MP* 7 (1909), 207–16 argues that these viking-incidents are interpolated. Hjálmpér's fight with Toki shows similarities to the young *Beowulf*'s battles with water-monsters and with Grendel.

come. Hjálmpér and Ölvir then went hunting and pursued a large, beautiful hind.²⁷ The chase led them to a cave in which a giant was sitting by a fire,²⁸ where he was combed by a female creature called *Skinnhúfa* ‘Skin-Hood’.²⁹ The giant told her to go out and listen for the men that his sister (Lúða) had promised would arrive that evening. Skinnhúfa turned the two visitors into chickens,³⁰ and lied about their presence to the giant, before returning them to human form once the giant was asleep. Hjálmpér said he wanted to kill the giant, and they proceeded further into the cave. There a gold-adorned sword hung over the giant’s bed. Skinnhúfa said it was the only sword that could harm him. When Hjálmpér reached for the sword it slipped from its scabbard, but Skinnhúfa caught it in her hand. Hjálmpér then drove the sword through the sleeping giant, who leapt up and groped around before dying. Hjálmpér then took the sword, but Skinnhúfa objected, saying that Ölvir should rather have it.³¹ She did, however, strongly hint that Hjálmpér would find a better sword, one that would surpass all others. She then gave them many rare treasures and told them to call on her if they should need help in future.

Next, in chapter 10, comes the episode in which Hjálmpér acquires the peerless sword.³²

27 Cf. the stag-hunt in *Beowulf*, discussed in Chapter 10.

28 He is unnamed in the saga’s prose, but one of its verses later identifies him as *Bendill* ‘Little Band/Bond’, or perhaps *Beli* (one manuscript has dative singular *Belu*), a giant we shall encounter later in this study; see Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 537. In the *rimur* the giant is called principally *Skrimnir*, a name to which I return in Chapter 14; see Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 13, 16; Sir W. A. Craigie, *Specimens of Icelandic Rímur from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Century* 3 vols (London, 1952), I, 82.

29 In the *rimur* she is a troll-woman who brandishes a *sax* ‘short sword/long knife’, a *sara vöndr* ‘wand of wounds’—like Grendel’s mother with her *seax*; Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 15; Craigie, *Specimens*, I, 85. The following episode also shows similarities to the classical myth of Odysseus and the cyclops Polyphemus, which may have originated as a myth of the solar eclipse; see E. G. Suhr, ‘An Interpretation of the Medusa’, *Folklore* 76 (1965), 90–103 at 101–2.

30 An indication of the saga-author’s humour; in the *rimur*, the men become hawks.

31 In the *rimur* it is Ölvir who stabs the giant in the heart with the blade of a sword described as *enn itra brand* ‘the glorious firebrand’, *unda nadren uæna* ‘the fair adder of wounds’ and *unda nadren biarta* ‘the bright adder of wounds’; Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 15; Craigie, *Specimens*, I, 85.

32 FSN, IV, 198–202; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 473–8. For prior thoughts on Vargeisa, the female monster of this episode, and her encounter with Hjálmpér, see S. B. Straubhaar, ‘Nasty, Brutish, and Large: Cultural Difference and Otherness in the Figuration of the Trollwomen of the *Fornaldar sögur*’, *SS* 73 (2001), 105–24 at 119–22.

Hjálmþér and Ölvir set off raiding again. One late autumn evening they came to a wooded island. That night Hjálmpér heard a great noise. Out of the forest came a large and brawny female monster, a *finngálkn*.³³ She had a horse's tail, hooves and mane, white eyes, a large mouth and long arms. In her hand she had a *brand ... vænan* 'handsome firebrand/sword', such that Hjálmpér had never seen the like. He addressed her in verse:

‘Hver er sú dóttir, er drjúgt um nætr
 flanar ok flöktir með fíls hala?
 Ólík þykki mér þú öðrum vífum,
 eða hvaðan komt, Hrauðungs mæ?’³⁴

‘Who's that daughter who by nights rushes heedlessly (so) much and flies about(?) with an elephant's tail? You seem to me unlike other women, and whence have you come, Hrauðungr's girl?’

She replied with another stanza:

‘Vargeisa ek heiti. Heyr þú, vísir [v.l. hilmis] son,
 viltu, at ek þér í sinni sé?
 Allra þinna telk þik þurfa munu
 vel [v.l. mun vil] trúra vína.’³⁵

‘I'm called Vargeisa. Listen, leader's son—do you wish that I should be on your side/in your company? I reckon you'll certainly need all of your true friends.’

33 A term for a monster that is half-man, half-beast (sometimes a centaur), and that may emerge from the sea; see *CV* s.v. *finn-gálkn*; J. Rogers, ‘Monster of the Month: Finngálkn—the Sphinx’ (14 September 2016), <https://grapevine.is/culture/art/monster-of-the-month/2016/09/14/monster-of-the-month-finngalkn-the-sphinx/>; Davíð Erlingsson, ‘Ormur, Marmennill, Nykur: Three Creatures of the Watery World’, in P. Lysaght, S. Ó Catháin and D. Ó hÓgáin (ed.), *Islanders and Water-Dwellers: Proceedings of the Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium held at University College Dublin 16–19 June 1996* (Blackrock, 1999), 61–80 at 77; Einar Sigmarsson, ‘Hamskipti eða endaskipta? Um *nykur* og *nykrað*, *finngálkn* og *finngálknæð*’, *Gripla* 16 (2005), 287–98. Cf. *OED* ‘nicker’, from OE *nicor*, a term used of creatures in Grendel's mere, which down the years has variously denoted water-demon, kelpie (water-horse), mermaid and dragon; see J. Simpson, ‘At the Bottom of Bottomless Pools’, in Lysaght, Ó Catháin and Ó hÓgáin, *Islanders and Water-Dwellers*, 317–24.

34 *FSN*, IV, 198; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 474; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 495.

35 *FSN*, IV, 198–9. Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 474; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 497.

He answered:

‘Hræðilig muntu þykkja hölda liði,
þótt þú oss í sinni sér.
Engan várn seggja þú svíkja munt,
vösk vinkona, Vör hin harðleita.’³⁶

‘You’ll seem dreadful to my band of men, even if you help us. You’ll betray none of our men, O valiant female friend, hard-looking Vör [i.e., goddess].’

She confirmed his confidence in her, and said she could help even if she did not come with him. Their conversation then turned to the subject of the sword she carried:

Hann mælti: ‘Áttu brand þann, er þú ferr með?’

‘At vísu,’ segir hún.

‘Viltu selja mér hann?’ segir hann.

‘Með engu móti,’ segir hún.

‘Skal ek með engu móti fá hann?’ segir Hjálmpér.

‘Ekki skal þat þó, karlmaðr,’ segir hún, ‘þú skalt kyssa mik,’ segir hún, ok varð henni ljóð at munn:

‘Sæk þú Snarvendil, sigr mun honum fylgja,
horskr, ef þú, hilmir, vilt þér í hendi bera.
Koss vil ek af þér klénan þiggja,
þá muntu Mímung mér ór hendi fá.’³⁷

He said: ‘Do you own that firebrand [i.e., sword] that you go around with?’

‘Certainly,’ she says.

‘Will you give me it?’ he says.

‘By no means,’ she says.

‘Shall I by no means get it?’ says Hjálmpér.

36 FSN, IV, 199; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 474; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 497–8.

37 FSN, IV, 199–200; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 475; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 498–9.

‘It shan’t be (the case that you’ll get it) unless, valiant man’, she says, ‘you shall kiss me,’ she says, and a verse came to her mouth:

‘Seek/take Snarvendill—victory will accompany it—wise one, if you, prince, want to bear it in your hand. I want to receive a nice kiss from you—then you will receive Mímungr/the sword from my hand.’

Afraid he would stick to her snout if he kissed her, Hjalmpér turned away. He changed his mind, though, when he remembered what Skinnhúfa had told him. He then addressed another stanza to Vargeisa, who was apparently playing with her sword:

‘Kanntu mjúkligar, mæR in harðleita,
leika at hrækerti en höldar aðrir sex.
Sel þú mér sárloga sveiptan orms dýnu;
fúss em ek fljóð at kyssa, ferr sem má jöfri.’³⁸

‘You, hard-looking girl, know how to play with the corpse-candle [SWORD] more strongly than six other men. Give me the wound-flame [SWORD] wrapped in a snake’s eiderdown [GOLD/VAGINA]; I’m eager to kiss the woman, go as it may for the prince.’

She replied:

‘Þá verðr þú at hlaupa á háls mér, í því ek kasta upp brandinum, en ef þú efar þik [v.l. á þik kemr], þá er þat þinn bani.’

Hún kastar nú upp sverðinu. Í því hleypr hann á háls henni ok kyssti hana, en hún henti sverðit fyrir aptan bak honum. Hún réttir nú at honum brandinn ok kvað vísu:

‘Sel ek þér Snarvendil, sigR mun honum fylgja,
jöfurr inn stórráði, um þína aldrdaga;
snúist þín ævi æ til sigrs ok gæfu,
hvar sem þú heim kannar, hugr er í konungs barni.’³⁹

‘Then you must leap on my neck at the instant I throw up the firebrand [SWORD], but if you hesitate [v.l. it hits you], then that will be your death.’

38 FSN, IV, 200; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 475; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 499–500.

39 FSN, IV, 200–1; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 476; Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 501.

Now she throws up the sword. At that instant he leaps on her neck and he kissed her, and she caught the sword in her hand(s) behind his back. She now hands the firebrand to him and spoke a verse:

'I give you Snarvendill—victory will accompany it—O strong-minded boar [i.e., warrior]—throughout your life-days; your life will always turn to victory and good luck, wherever you know [i.e., have] your home—there's courage in the king's son.'

Later we learn that this sword is a *dvergasmíði* 'work of dwarves'.⁴⁰ Also, the implicit radiance of this 'corpse-candle' becomes explicit: *lýsti af honum sem ljósi* 'it shone like a light'.⁴¹

Significantly, too, in the saga's final chapter we discover that Vargeisa was originally a beautiful princess called *Álsól* (or probably better, I think, *Alsól*) 'All-Sun'⁴² or *Álfsól* 'Elf-Sun', whom Hjalmpér marries.⁴³ Lúða, it turns out, had transformed her into a *finngákn* and then given her Snarvendill, whereupon *Var hún hann at henda ýmist með munni eða höndum* 'She [Vargeisa] busied herself handling it variously with her mouth or hands'.⁴⁴ This curious detail is inexplicit in the prior description of Hjalmpér's encounter with her, but implicit in Hjalmpér's reference to Vargeisa playing so vigorously with the blazing sword wrapped in the 'snake's eiderdown'; this is a double entendre suggesting both that the sword is covered with gold (i.e., golden-hilted) and that Vargeisa is using it enthusiastically as a dildo, her vagina being in effect her lower mouth.⁴⁵ In the *rimur*, Vargeisa's peculiar handling of the sword was explicit at the time, but without the sexual aspect: *hrotti fleygir hatt aa loptt / ok hendir suerd med munne* 'she throws Hrotti/the sword high into

40 FSN, IV, 209. Throughout, I use the plural spelling 'dwarves' for the mythological creatures, which is in common popular (if not scholarly) use, rather than 'dwarfs'.

41 FSN, IV, 229.

42 FSN, IV, 240–2.

43 Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, III, 514 n. 1; O'Connor, *Icelandic Histories*, 101; similarly, Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 73. Cf. M. Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London, 1934), 61, 101.

44 FSN, IV, 241.

45 The sexual connotation is corroborated by a subsequent encounter between Hjalmpér and a troll-woman called Ýma (see Chapter 7). For the concepts of the vagina as a hole for a firebrand and as a 'nether mouth', sometimes of a toothed beast such as a wolf (a *vagina dentata*), see M. Morton, *The Lover's Tongue: A Merry Romp through the Language of Love and Sex* (Toronto, 2003), 141–2; D. Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter, 1996), 164–8.

the air and catches the sword with her mouth'.⁴⁶ Additionally, from the *rímur* it appears that Hjálmpér took the sword from her mouth:

Tigge geck at trionv uargs
ok tok uid sara uendi,
sidan kysti hann suediv biargs,
suerd er grams i hendi.⁴⁷

The 'king' [i.e., Hjálmpér] went to the snout of the outlaw/thief/wolf and received [or 'took therefrom?'] the wand of wounds [SWORD]; after he kissed the *suediv* of the rock [GIANTESS],⁴⁸ the sword is in the warrior's hand.⁴⁹

By kissing Vargeisa, Hjálmpér had broken the spell over Ál(f)sól. From the saga we also learn that Lúða had transformed Ál(f)sól's sister, Hildisíf, into Skinnhúfa. Hjálmpér had broken the spell over Hildisíf by killing Lúða's brother, the cave-dwelling giant, with the sword that hung over the giant's bed.

In this saga the golden-hilted 'corpse-candle'⁵⁰ received by Hjálmpér from Vargeisa (who acquired it from Ingi's wife, Lúða) is another

46 Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 21. Whether *Hrotti* is a proper noun or a common noun here is uncertain, but if Snarvendill is also called *Hrotti*, the likely Old Norse equivalent of OE *Hrunting*, this could be most significant, as we shall see. The *rímur* also provide further details about Snarvendill: it is *sett med orma stræte* 'set with streets of snakes'; its edge is *i snaka eitru herda* 'hardened in the poison of snakes' (compare *Hrotti* as the sword of the monstrous snake *Fáfnir* in the concluding prose to the Eddic poem *Fáfnismál* 'Fáfnir's Sayings'); it is *uænna* 'more beautiful' than any other sword *i þessum heime* 'in this world'; *laugud egg i linna ferd / ok lyst med grædis eime* 'its edge bathes in the journey of snakes [i.e., sea? scabbard? snakes' poisonous trails?]' and shines with fire of the sea [i.e., gold]; it is a *Biartann ... brand* 'bright firebrand'; *ibid.*, 22–3, 70.

47 Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 23.

48 So Finnur Jónsson, *Ordbog til de af Samfund til udg. ad gml. nord. litteratur udgivne rímur samt til de af Dr. O. Jiriczek udgivne Bósarímur* (Copenhagen, 1926–8), s.v. *sveðja*.

49 Vargeisa is not the only 'wolf' to have a sword in its mouth in Norse mythology. When the monstrous wolf Fenrir gaped mightily at the gods, they propped its jaws open *sverði nokkvoru* 'with a certain sword' (*SnEGylf*, 29). This sword is neither named nor described, but could well be solar (see Chapter 10).

50 Cf., in the *rímur*, *Hjálmpér bregdr hræfa tein* 'Hjálmpér draws the twig of corpses'; Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, II, 44. The candle-sword is apparently therefore also a 'twig-sword', an important concept which we shall encounter more than once over the course of this study. That the notion of a twig-sword—or at least a wooden sword—was more than metaphorical, and that a such a sword might be radiant is probably shown by a sixth- or seventh-century wooden, rune-inscribed sword from Arum, West Frisia, which has a burnt tip; *SASE5-7*, 325. There is also the testimony of an Old English prose remedy *wið fleogendan attre* 'for flying poison', part of the

candle-sword to compare with (in my view) Beowulf's golden-hilted giant sword, although, unlike that sword, it does not melt. The saga's sword apparently has two names: *Snarvendill* and *Mímungr* (unless the latter word is used rather as a common noun for 'sword'). Neither of these names appear in *Beowulf*, but the first possibly identifies it as a Danish weapon: *snarr* 'hard-twisted', 'swift' or 'penetrating' + *Vendill* 'Vandil, a local name, the northern part of Jutland'.⁵¹ *Mímungr*, for its part, was a famous sword of Germanic legend, one known to Old English heroic tradition,⁵² and to which we shall return in connection with the giant sword.

Other similarities exist between *Snarvendill* and the giant sword. *Snarvendill* was made by dwarves, rather as the giant sword was forged by giants—despite their different statures, giants and dwarves are akin in Old Norse mythology and share certain attributes.⁵³ More importantly, the circumstances surrounding the swords' acquisition

Lacnunga. It instructs that an oaken *brand* 'firebrand' or '(fiery) sword' be used to cut four scarifications on four sides (presumably of an infected place on a person's body), that the *brand* be made bloody and then thrown away, and that a Christian prayer be sung three times over the wounds. The prayer invokes the aid of the Four Evangelists, each accompanied by a sign of the Cross, and of the Holy Trinity against all the artifices of the Enemy (i.e., the Devil); see Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, I, 88–9, II, 211–2 (the translation of *brand* as 'stick' or 'piece of wood' is inadequate). This remedy merits comparison to Beowulf's use of the giant sword to remedy the Danes' affliction, although the latter was not airborne and the giant sword's blade was made of iron, not wood (the giant sword very probably does, however, have affiliations with metaphorical twig-swords). The giant sword is similarly covered in newly shed, poisonous, devilish blood, and similarly conquers by (in my view) combining physical assault with Christian spiritual power, including that of the Cross; and although the giant sword is not thrown away, but rather melts down to its hilt, in both texts the conquering sword is, in a sense, lost. It is also of some interest that this prose remedy immediately precedes the aforementioned cure in which a piece of witch-made iron, supposedly embedded in a person's body, is commanded to melt (see Chapter 2).

- 51 See CV s.v. *Vendill*. Alternatively or additionally, *-vendill* might be interpreted as a diminutive of *vǫndr* 'wand', a 'sword'-term we shall re-encounter; *Snarvendill* would then be a 'hard-twisted/swift/penetrating little wand', tantamount to the associated notion of a twig-sword. Cf. *Dragovendill*, an exemplary sword mentioned in Old Norse sagas such as *Ketils saga hængs* 'The Saga of Ketill Salmon' (*FSN*, II, 164), and see further Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 60, 63; *PTP*, 790–1, which observes that *Vandill* is also the name of a sea-king and a giant.
- 52 See Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 55–6.
- 53 See V. T. Hafstein, 'Groaning Dwarfs at Granite Doors: Fieldwork in *Völuspá*', *ANF* 118 (2003), 29–45 at 33; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole: Problems in Medieval Dwarfology', *Arv* 61 (2005), 53–76 at 69.

look similar. Hjálmpér acquired his sword from Vargeisa, a monstrous female, after an extremely dangerous, albeit amorous, physical encounter in which he had to jump on her neck, which presumably means her shoulders. This encounter involved the sword in a form of play (*leika*), in which Vargeisa apparently transferred the weapon between her hands and mouth. This transference does not find clear parallel in *Beowulf*, but Beowulf did acquire the giant sword soon after being carried by Grendel's *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' mother (1498)—below and in Chapter 15 I examine the possibility that she is a sword-swallower—possibly across her shoulder (*Bær þa seo brimwyllf] ... hringa þengel* 'Then the sea-she-wolf bore the prince of rings', 1506–7). He then seized her by the shoulder (*Gefeng þa be eaxle* 1537).⁵⁴ This move was part of an encounter in which wrestling imagery, with sexual overtones,⁵⁵ continues to its climax, when *hire wið halse heard grapode* 'it [i.e., the giant sword]/he gripped her hard by the neck' (1566), a wording that imagines the giant sword's blade as an extension of, or a companion to, Beowulf's wrestling arm. Moreover, the giant sword is described as being carried into *beadulace* 'battle-play' (1561), a word, used only here in *Beowulf*, in which the noun *lac* 'play' is cognate with the Old Norse verb *leika*. It may well also be significant that both swords have a 'double' that the hero gives to another man after using it successfully. In the saga, the unnamed sword with which Hjálmpér killed the sleeping giant also corresponds to Beowulf's unnamed giant sword; it is then given to Ölvir. In *Beowulf* the sword with which (it seems likely) the hero killed the grasping sea-monster during his swimming match with Breca (555–8) foreshadows the giant sword,⁵⁶ but is then entrusted to Unferð, Hroðgar's spokesman.

The two female monsters also have much in common, as I shall now show. This is despite the fact that Vargeisa is essentially friendly (though potentially deadly) to Hjálmpér, whereas Grendel's mother is implacably hostile to Beowulf throughout their encounter (though she voluntarily brings him into her home).

54 Although *eaxle* 'shoulder' is here possibly a corruption of *feaxe* 'hair'.

55 See J. C. Nitzsche, 'The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*: The Problem of Grendel's Mother', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22 (1980), 287–303 at 293–4.

56 Similarly, the former sword appears implicitly equated with Beowulf's hand: *orde, hildebille ... fornam ... þurh mine hand* 'with point, with battle-bill ... carried off ... through my hand' (556–8).

Vargeisa very probably means 'Thief/Outlaw/Wolf-Embers'.⁵⁷ Assuming this unique name encapsulates the essence of its bearer, it indicates an outlawed and latently hot female creature who, in addition to having explicit equine and elephantine attributes, may well be to some extent lupine. *Vargeisa's* latent heat may well have resided in her blood, especially as blood was imagined by one tenth-century Icelandic poet as *glóðheitr sveiti* 'gleed-hot sweat'.⁵⁸ If it did, *Vargeisa* may have shared this characteristic with Grendel's mother, assuming the latter conferred this property on her excessively hot-blooded son.⁵⁹ Similarly, too, Grendel's mother, like her son, was an outlaw, an exile from God. The two Old English monsters also have lupine associations, as Grendel's mother is a *brimwylf* 'sea-she-wolf' (1506,⁶⁰ 1599), and she and her son occupied *wulfhleobu* 'wolf-slopes' (1358).⁶¹ Furthermore, both *Vargeisa* and Grendel's mother may well have been sword-thieves.

57 ON *vargr* + *eisa*; cf. Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 497; cf. *ímleitr* 'dusky, gray-coloured', describing a wolf (CV, LP), but literally 'ash/ember-looking'. ON *vargr* is also attested as a poetic term for 'sword', and appears in compound 'sword'-terms such as *benvargr* 'wound-wolf'; PTP, 809, 811; Falk, *Altnordisches Waffenkunde*, 62; cf. other terms describing swords as wolves in PTP, 796–7, 800–1. That the original meaning of *vargr* (OE *wearg/wearh*; Germanic **uargaz*) was 'thief', and that 'wolf' is a secondary development, is shown by F. C. Robinson, 'Germanic **uargaz* (OE *wearh*) and the Finnish Evidence', in J. Walmsley (ed.), *Inside Old English: Essays in Honour of Bruce Mitchell* (Oxford, 2006), 242–7. In the *rímur* *Vargeisa* is also termed simply a *vargr* (*trionv uargs* 'snout of the thief/outlaw/wolf'); Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafni*, II, 23. A related Middle English term may denote an evil spirit of the night in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* (*verye*, 3485); see M. Osborn, 'Die Monster in *Beowulf*', in U. Müller and W. Wunderlich (ed.), *Dämonen Monster Fabelwesen* (Konstanz, 2015), 161–9 at 164. ON *eisa* also appears in a list of poetic terms for 'fire'; PTP, 922.

58 Gade, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 2, 268.

59 At least some Norse giantesses were internally fiery, as shown by their flaming breath or eyes; see M. Puhvel, 'The Mighty She-Trolls of Icelandic Saga and Folk-Tale', *Folklore* 98 (1987), 175–9 at 176–7; T. Gunnell, 'Grýla, Grýlur, "Grøleks" and Skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic?', *Arv* 57 (2001), 33–54 at 46. See also my discussion of the troll-woman *Yma* in Chapter 7.

60 This instance is an emendation of *brimwyl*.

61 As such, Grendel's mother is probably related to *ylgrin* 'the she-wolf' which Þoðvarr Bjarki (a *Beowulf*-analogue) fatally strikes in the fifteenth-century *Bjarkarímur* 'Bjarki's Rhymes', and from which *ferligt blóð* 'monstrous blood' flowed; see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur* (Copenhagen, 1904), 139–40; cf. J. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Cambridge, 2005), 132–3. Newton, *Origins*, 143–4 proposes a link between Grendel and *Shuck* (from OE *scucca* 'devil', a word found in *Beowulf* 939) or the phantom 'Black Dog' of folklore, on which see also T. Brown, 'The Black Dog', *Folklore* 69 (1958), 175–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587x.1958.9717142>. For more connections between Norse giants, giantesses, troll-women and wolves, see Chapter 7 n. 33, Chapter 14 (on

Vargeisa is not said to have stolen her sword, which she received from Lúða. However, Hjálmpér questions her ownership of it, and her reply is perhaps too emphatically affirmative to convince. Given Lúða's utterly evil character, we may wonder whether Vargeisa was in receipt of a sword that had been stolen—from Ingi? More clearly, Vargeisa's name suggests she was a thief (*vargr*).

Grendel's mother is similarly called a *grundwyrgen* 'ground/depth-thief/outcast/wolf(?)' (1518), a term in which *-wyrgen* is cognate with *Varg-* in *Vargeisa*,⁶² and she and her son inhabit a lair containing many treasures, presumably illicitly acquired. Moreover, there are other indications (examined more fully later) that Grendel and his mother were sword-thieves. Most importantly, Grendel is a *heorowearh*, a unique compound that, in my view, may be interpreted as 'sword-criminal', more specifically 'sword-thief' (1267).⁶³ For her part, Grendel's mother furtively takes her son's severed sword-like arm from Heorot.⁶⁴ Additionally, she is *heorogifre ... grim ond grædig* 'sword-greedy ... grim and greedy' (1498–9),⁶⁵ which, taken literally, suggests that she was

Hyndla), and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, 'The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature', *JEGP* 106 (2007), 277–303 at 299. Of interest, too, is the obscure Old English poem *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which may implicitly associate a certain *Wulf* 'Wolf', who inhabits an island surrounded by fen, with Cain, ancestor of Grendel and Grendel's mother; see R. North, 'Metre and Meaning in *Wulf and Eadwacer*: Signý Reconsidered', in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (ed.), *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose* (Groningen, 1994), 29–54 at 51. Finally, note the model of a somewhat dog-like monster with a long neck placed on a cross at the bottom of an Anglo-Saxon silver bowl recovered from the River Witham, Lincolnshire in 1816, but since lost; J. Graham-Campbell, 'On the Witham Bowl', *Antiquaries Journal* 84 (2004), 358–71; 'The Witham Bowl', <https://artasmedia.com/portfolio/thewithambowl>

62 And more precisely with ON *vargynja* 'she-wolf' (plural *vargynjur*), a term that, I suggest below, may describe Vargeisa. Whether OE *w(e)arg* and the related *-wyrgen* refer to wolves is questionable, according to Robinson, 'Germanic *uargaz'.

63 For 'thief' as the original sense behind *wearg*, see n. 57 above, though Robinson, 'Germanic *uargaz', 246 says *heorowearh* means 'fierce outlaw', and KB, 395 has 'fierce outcast, savage foe'. *Heoru(-)* means 'sword' elsewhere in *Beowulf*, such as only shortly afterwards in *heoru* (1285). A word related to *wearh*, *werga* 'accursed', describes Grendel in *wergan gastes* 'of the accursed spirit' (133; also describes the Devil in 1747). *Unferð* is condemned to *werhðo* 'damnation' (589)—another related word—in Hell, where Grendel also resides. In an Old English translation of *Genesis*, Cain is *awyrgeð* 'cursed' by God for killing Abel; S. J. Crawford (ed.), *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch, Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, EETS o.s. 160 (London, 1922), 92.

64 See Chapter 5.

65 KB, 396 defines *heoro-gifre* as '(sword-greedy), fiercely ravenous'; similarly, Cronan, 'Poetic Words', 31.

a sword-swallower, and therefore perhaps that she held at least one (probably stolen) sword within her body.⁶⁶ If this sounds implausible, recall that Vargeisa used to pass her candle-sword between her hands and her *mouth*, that in the *rímur* Hjálmpér seems to have taken the prized sword from her snout,⁶⁷ and that other comparative evidence suggests a kinship between Grendel's mother as *brimwylf* and a sword-swallowing fish (see Chapter 15).

The parallels between Vargeisa and Grendel's mother go further still. Both journeyed through trees. Grendel's mother passed *æfter waldswaþum* 'along forest-tracks' (1403). She presumably also passed through the frosty groves of trees that overhung the mere (1363–4), which may be identifiable with the *fyrghenholt* 'mountain-wood' (1393) to which Beowulf says she will not escape.

In addition, as Grendel's mother emerged from water on to land, so too, most likely, did Vargeisa. There are three reasons for associating Vargeisa with water:⁶⁸

- (a) The name *Vargeisa* and her presence on an island suggest that she may be akin to, or even one of, the *vargynjur* 'she-wolves/thieves/outlaws' who, according to the Eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð* 'Lay of Hárbarðr' (37–9),⁶⁹ smashed ships

66 L. Teresi, 'The Old English Term *Heoru* Reconsidered', *BJRL* 86 (2004), 127–78 at 141–4 discusses the semantics of the five instances of the adjective *heorogifre* in Old English poetry. The other instances connote devouring fire and hot lead, and Teresi states that the compound 'certainly ... bears no immediate connection with a sword'. She interprets *Beowulf's* instance as 'greedy for destruction' or 'greedy for death/slaughter' (144). But given the sword-consuming heat of Grendel's mother's blood (and/or her son's), a fiery connotation could well be applicable in *Beowulf*. More importantly, Teresi seems to me to be wrong to reject the interpretation 'sword-greedy' in this context. Nietzsche, 'Structural Unity', 294, describes Grendel's mother as 'the "sword-greedy" woman (*heorogifre*, 1498), who collects the swords of giants'. Note that at the moment Beowulf beholds the *heorogifre* giantess with the giant sword, he is *heorogrim* 'sword-grim' (1564).

67 Later we shall adduce Old Norse myths in which certain fish swallow a sword or tremble upon a sword(?)—point—fish comparable, in my view, to Grendel's mother as *brimwylf*.

68 Note also the 'ship'-kenning *vargr hafs eisar* 'the wolf of the sea dashes'. Elsewhere the verb *eisa* means 'to shower down embers'; see CV s.v. *eisa*.

69 For an edition of most of the Eddic poems referenced in this study, see G. Neckel and H. Kuhn (ed.), *Edda: die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, Band I. Text*, corr. 5th edn. (Heidelberg, 1983), 84, although my quotations use different orthography. Stanza numbering is that of this Neckel-Kuhn edition, for the poems found therein. Translations from Eddic poetry are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

belonging to the thunder-god Þórr on *Hlésey* ‘Hlér’s Island’.⁷⁰ *Hlér* is an alias of *Ægir*, a sea-giant whose nine daughters personified waves—aquatic phenomena liable to dash ships on shores.⁷¹

- (b) Vargeisa’s nature as a *finngálkn* provides reason to link her with both water and Grendel’s mother. An episode from the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Brennu-Njáls saga* ‘Saga of Burnt-Njáll’ describes the foreign exploits of an Icelandic chieftain named Porkell hákr Þorgeirsson, which seem to have been styled on the eastern giant-killing expeditions of Þórr.⁷² First, Porkell killed an evildoer in a Swedish wood. Second, after a long struggle, he slew a *finngálkn* east of the south-west coast of Finland, after he had gone to find water one evening. Third, further east again, he killed a flying dragon in Estonia. As others have observed,⁷³ the *finngálkn*’s lair was presumably in or near a body of water, as was Grendel’s mother’s. Hence the Icelandic hero’s three fights may parallel, or reflect, the three great fights of Beowulf against the evildoer Grendel, Grendel’s semi-aquatic mother and a flying dragon. This parallel correlates Grendel’s mother with a *finngálkn*.
- (c) *Hrauðungr* ‘Destroyer(?)’, the name by which Hjálmpér refers to Vargeisa’s father in one version of his opening stanza to her, is elsewhere that of a *sea-king*.⁷⁴

A final, important similarity between Vargeisa and Grendel’s mother is that after they are overcome by the lone hero, a solar light appears. Beowulf beheaded Grendel’s mother with the giant sword in a stroke described as a hard neck-grip, whereupon (we shall see) a sun-like light immediately shone. Hjálmpér removed a transformative curse on

70 See also Chapter 7 of this study for Hjálmpér’s subsequent encounter with ship-smashing troll-women in the same saga.

71 Cf. Chapter 7 n. 71.

72 Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ÍF 12 (Reykjavík, 1944), 302–3.

73 G. Clark, ‘Beowulf and Njálssaga’, in P. Foote, Hermann Pálsson and D. Slay (ed.), *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference, University of Edinburgh, 1971* (London, 1973), 66–87 at 71; J. Opland, ‘A Beowulf Analogue in *Njálssaga*’, *SS* 45 (1973), 54–8 at 56.

74 *SnESkald*, I, 110.

Vargeisa, and thereby eliminated the *finngálkn*, by jumping on her neck and kissing her—she then gave him the sword and assumed her true form as *Álsól* ‘All-Sun’ or *Álfsól* ‘Elf-Sun’.

The nature of the relationship between *Hjálmþés saga* and *Beowulf* is elusive, but although some influence of *Beowulf* on the saga is conceivable, it is clearly not a case of simple borrowing. Whatever the exact relationship, it seems quite likely that the saga’s candle-sword, its monstrous female guardian and her killer are counterparts to, respectively, the candle-like giant sword, Grendel’s mother and Beowulf.

Grýla’s Icicle-Candle

Vargeisa is not the only monstrous Norse female associated with a metaphorical candle and comparable to Grendel’s mother. A Modern Icelandic word for ‘icicle’, especially a large one, is *grýlukerti*, literally ‘Grýla’s candle’,⁷⁵ *Grýla* being the name of a monstrous folkloric female notorious for attacking children especially. Although this particular icicle-candle is not equated, explicitly at least, with a sword, it merits attention for reasons that will soon become apparent.

The compound noun *grýlukerti* is not attested in Old Norse literature, but its first element, *grýlu*, does appear in medieval sources as the name of a terrifying ogress.⁷⁶ Among the medieval sources is *Skáldskaparmál* ‘The Language of Poetry’, part of Snorri’s *Prose Edda*. There *Grýla* appears near the start of a list of poetic names of *tröllkvinna* ‘troll-women’, which is thought to date from the twelfth century: *Gríðr ok Gnissa Grýla, Brýla ...* ‘Gríðr and Gnissa, Grýla, Brýla ...’⁷⁷ One manuscript of *Skáldskaparmál* also contains a verse list of *Grýlu heiti* ‘(Poetic) Names for Grýla’, judging from which *Grýla* was identified with a fox (a canid) and may also have had a giant, lupine, devilish aspect.⁷⁸

75 Sverrir Hólmarrsson, C. Sanders and J. Tucker, *Íslensk-ensk orðabók* (Reykjavík, 1989), s.v.; Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók*, 2nd edn. (Reykjavík, 1993), s.v.

76 On *Grýla*, see Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og Æfintýri* (Leipzig, 1862–4), I, 218–21; J. Simpson, *Icelandic Folktales & Legends* (Stroud, 2004), 102–4; Gunnell, ‘Grýla’.

77 *SnESkald*, I, 112; PTP, 724.

78 PTP, 965–7. With *skolli* and *skollr*, compare the wolf *Skoll* (also *Sköll*) discussed in Chapter 10.

Skolli, slapparðr ok Skaufhali,
 skollr, melrakki, skaufi, Grýla;
 enn es refr ok Skröggr, öldungr, dáinn,
 laufafettir, fóa, brunnmigi.

Skulker [a folkloric fox], weakling and Skaufhali ['Tassel-Tale', a fox humanized as an old outlaw in one tale], skulker/deceiver, arctic fox [literally 'sand-bank dog'], tailed one, Grýla; further there is fox and Skröggr [a folkloric giant whose name suggests a devilish and/or lupine nature],⁷⁹ famous man/elder, deceased one, leaf-pacer, fox, spring/well-pisser.⁸⁰

In addition, the first part of the twelfth-century *Sverris saga* 'Sverrir's Saga' is named *Grýla*. According to one late fourteenth-century commentator, this is because the saga's contents prompted the belief that great wars would arise but quickly fade away.⁸¹ From this explanation we might tentatively infer that Grýla was a threatening character who was associated with hostilities, but who soon vanished. More likely, however, this part of the saga is so-called because Sverrir and his men had lived for a time as outlaws in the Norwegian wilderness, from which they descended, like Grýla, to obtain food from local people.⁸²

Medieval sources give scant details of Grýla's character. But as one scholar observes, 'the number of extant thirteenth-century references stresses that the associations of her name must have been well-known to most people'.⁸³ This raises the possibility that traditions about her existed considerably earlier. Also, what little these sources do reveal about Grýla strengthens the impression conveyed by later folklore that she has more than a little in common with Grendel's mother.

Grýla evidently impressed Snorri, since hers was the name he chose for his booth *upp frá* 'above' the Law-Rock at Pingvellir in Iceland, according to *Sturlunga saga* 'The Saga of the Sturlungar'.⁸⁴ This reference gives no firm indication of Grýla's character, but Snorri's wry choice

79 Cf. New Norwegian *skrogg* 'wolf', Modern Swedish dialect *skragge* 'devil'; see A. Liberman, 'Further Adventures of Scr-words, or, the Taming of "Shrew"', *OUPblog* (2 May 2012), <https://blog.oup.com/2012/05/word-origin-shrew>

80 See further on these names the notes in *PTP*, 966–7, to which I owe this translation.

81 Gunnell, 'Grýla', 34–5.

82 Gunnell, 'Grýla', 46–7.

83 Gunnell, 'Grýla', 34.

84 Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn (ed.), *Sturlunga saga*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1946), I, 269.

of name may well have been intended to unsettle his opponents. In later Icelandic folklore, Grýla is notorious as a ferocious old woman with a beard and deformed nails who descends from the mountains at Christmas to stuff into her bag misbehaved children, whom she will later devour, though her appetite also extends to adults.⁸⁵ It seems likely that Snorri was likening his descent from his booth to that of Grýla upon her prey.

The notion that a man might assume the persona of Grýla when descending on foes probably also explains a verse quoted by one Loftr Pálsson, slightly later in *Sturlunga saga*, when he rode to attack his enemies at Breiðabólstaðir in 1221:

‘Hér ferr Grýla
í garð ofan
ok hefir á sér
hala fimmtán.’⁸⁶

‘Here Grýla comes down from above into the yard and has on herself fifteen tails.’

That Grýla was known in the thirteenth century for her hostile journeys is also indicated by a verse recited still later in *Sturlunga saga* by a certain Guðmundr Galtason. He seems to imply that it is time to adopt the persona of Grýla and attack his foes:

‘Hvat’s um,—hví kveðum sæta?
Heim gengr Sterkr af verki.
Vitu rekkar nú nakkvat
nýligs um för Grýlu?’⁸⁷

‘What’s up—why are we talking about making peace? [Jón the] Strong is going home from work. Now do you warriors know any news about Grýla’s journeys?’

85 Her thirteen sons, born either to the trollish *Leppa-Lúði* ‘Jerk of Rags/Locks (of Hair)’ or a former partner, do likewise. They are therefore known as the *Jólasveinar* ‘Yule Lads’.

86 Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, *Sturlunga saga*, I, 281.

87 Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, *Sturlunga saga*, I, 324. Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 36 interprets the second sentence as a question: ‘Is Strong going home from work?’

Additionally, *Sturlunga saga* refers to a certain Steingrímur *Skinngryluson* ‘Skin-Grýla’s son’,⁸⁸ one of Loftr Pálsson’s principal targets. This indicates that Grýla had at least one son in medieval tradition—later Icelandic lore tells of men behaving like plural *grýlur*⁸⁹—and that she was associated with a skin or skins. *Sturlunga saga* also mentions a man called *Grýlu-Brandr* ‘Grýla’s Firebrand/Sword’,⁹⁰ which suggests that Grýla, the monster with the icicle-candle, was also associated with a fiery sword.

Faroese folklore, albeit not recorded until the nineteenth century, assigns Grýla a *skálm* ‘short sword’ or ‘knife’ (or more than one)—a ‘slightly archaic word’⁹¹—and corroborates her descent from high ground.⁹² Grendel’s mother also had such a weapon, a *seax* (1545). Furthermore, in the Faroe Isles, Grýla appeared during Lent, the period leading up to Easter,⁹³ which corresponds to the time at which Grendel’s mother attacked Heorot, according to the *Beowulf*-poet’s perspective (if my interpretation is correct). Nowadays, Grýla appears in the Faroes on days preceding Lent, but she is especially associated with a single night, *Grýlukvöld* ‘Grýla’s night’, that of Shrove Tuesday.⁹⁴ Grendel’s mother similarly attacked on a single night.

Finally, there is evidence linking the post-medieval Icelandic Grýla with the wilderness-dwelling monsters called *þingálp* and *Finnhálpn*,⁹⁵ two variants of *finngálpn*,⁹⁶ the monster-term used of both Vargeisa and Þorkell hákr Þorgeirsson’s second monstrous foe. Both Grýla and Vargeisa probably shared an equine aspect, too, both being tailed, hooved and equipped with long manes or heads of hair.

A connection between Grýla and Grendel’s mother has been advanced previously by William Sayers,⁹⁷ but mainly on the basis of linguistic correspondence. He observes that *Grýla* is etymologically

88 Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, *Sturlunga saga*, I, 279–82.

89 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 35.

90 Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, *Sturlunga saga*, I, 497.

91 T. Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Woodbridge, 1995), 166.

92 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 38.

93 Gunnell, *Origins*, 166; Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 38–9.

94 Gunnell, *Origins*, 162.

95 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 45–6.

96 See Gunnell, *Origins*, 144–5.

97 W. Sayers, ‘Grendel’s Mother, Icelandic Grýla, and Irish Nechta Scéne: Eviscerating Fear’, *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 16/17 (1996/1997), 256–68.

related to OE *gryre* ‘horror, terror’;⁹⁸ in fact, he calls the former word ‘the Norse equivalent’ of the latter, which the *Beowulf*-poet uses twice of Grendel’s mother in the following passage:⁹⁹

Wæs se gryre læssa
efne swa micle swa bið mægþa cræft,
wiggryre wifes, be wæpnedmen ... (1282–4)

The horror/attack [of Grendel’s mother] was lesser by just as much as is the strength of maidens, the war-horror/attack of a woman, in comparison to [that of] a weaponed man ...

The same word *gryre* describes Grendel’s mother in Beowulf’s report of his Danish adventure to his lord, Hygelac: the hero terms her a *grimne gryrelicne grundhyrde* ‘fierce, terrible seabed-herder’ (2136). Sayers wisely stops short, however, of claiming that we are authorized to believe that ‘Grendel’s mother was named *Gryre* in some distant version of the tale’.¹⁰⁰

In my view, Sayers perhaps somewhat exaggerates the significance of the etymological connection between ON *Grýla* and OE *gryre*, as they are clearly not exact cognates.¹⁰¹ At the same time, though, other similarities between the two females are considerably more extensive than he observes. Thus both:

- (a) Are ancient ogresses of varying or uncertain appearance.
- (b) Are not, at the same time, of clear-cut gender. In *Beowulf* it is only the Danes’ uncertain opinion that Grendel’s companion took *idese onlicnæs* ‘the form of a woman’ (1349–51),¹⁰² a phrase

98 Sayers, ‘Grendel’s Mother’, 261 n. 11 compares Middle Low German *gruwel*, *grüwel*, MHG *griuwel* ‘fright, terror’, Norwegian *grysjá* ‘frighten, terrify’ and Old Danish *gruue* ‘strain’, from Indo-European **ghreu-*, ‘bring into a heightened emotional state’.

99 Sayers also observes the word’s association with Grendel (*Beowulf* 174, 384, 478, 483, 591). M. Lapidge, ‘Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror’, in H. Damico and J. Leyerle (ed.), *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), 373–402 at 386 notes the frequency and distinctiveness of the poet’s use of *gryre* in compounds.

100 Sayers, ‘Grendel’s Mother’, 263.

101 Neither ANEW nor *ÍO*, s.v. *grýla* refer to OE *gryre*, which lacks an *-l-* suffix. The former does, however, mention OE *begroren* ‘frightened’ and *agrisan* ‘to quake, fear’. The latter work traces *grýla* back to the Indo-European root **ghrēu-* ‘to rub hard’, ‘crush’.

102 OE *ides* can also mean ‘queen’; cf. Queen Lúða in *Hjálmpés saga*.

which suggests she might not be all she appears, and the poem describes her in both masculine and feminine terms.¹⁰³ Grýla was also called *oldungr*, a masculine noun interpretable as ‘famous man’, and the persona of the bearded Grýla is adopted by men apparently without undermining their masculinity.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, a description of Grýla from the Faroe Islands—albeit not recorded until the twentieth century—attributes her a huge wooden phallus.¹⁰⁵

- (c) Have a canine/lupine aspect and associations.
- (d) Snatched and killed humans, in both cases apparently by eating them. The body of Æschere, the Dane whom Grendel’s mother snatched, was never found.
- (e) Attacked on a single night before summer. Both also have associations with Lent.
- (f) Invaded human habitations from the wilds. Grýla ‘came from the wild, *outside* the civilized surrounding of the farm’.¹⁰⁶
- (g) Advanced from high ground. Beowulf and the Danes who retraced Grendel’s mother’s steps passed over *steap stanhliðo* ‘steep rocky slopes’ (1409).
- (h) Wielded a short sword or knife.
- (i) Are in some sense dead. Grýla was called *dáinn* ‘deceased one’;¹⁰⁷ Grendel’s mother inhabited a hellish lake to which human corpses were brought.
- (j) Polluted water. Grýla is a *brunnmiga* ‘spring/well-pisser’; Beowulf cleansed Grendel’s turbulent mere by beheading both Grendel and his mother.

103 See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 189; D. M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, 2010), 91–101; P. B. Taylor, ‘Beowulf’s Second Grendel Fight’, *NM* 86 (1985), 62–9 at 63: ‘the sex of the assailant is grammatically confused’. See also Nitzsche, ‘Structural Unity’, 294 on ‘the inversion of the feminine role of the queen or hall-ruler by Grendel’s mother’.

104 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 35.

105 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 40. Sayers, ‘Grendel’s Mother’, 262 takes the view that ‘a great deal of an original conception of medieval Grýla has been retained in the later folklore of Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Shetland, and Orkney’.

106 Gunnell, ‘Grýla’, 36.

107 As were a dwarf and a stag (see Chapter 13).

- (k) Are linked with the sea and to some extent piscine. Late Faroese folklore records that Grýla wore a coat of seaweed,¹⁰⁸ and sometimes had a fish-stomach. We shall later find that, as a *brimwylf*, Grendel's mother may well be likened to a greedy fish.
- (l) Last but not least, are associated with an icicle-candle (if my interpretation of *Beowulf's* imagery is correct). Given Grýla's unremittingly hostile nature, her icicle-candle, whose touch would presumably inflict ice-burns, might have been identified, or conflated, with the *brand* '(burning) sword' after which Grýlu-Brandr was possibly named. We may compare *Beowulf's* imagery of the burning, melting giant sword found in proximity to Grendel's mother, which dwindled 'with battle-icicles'.

As with Vargeisa, however, the precise nature of the connection between Grendel's mother and Grýla seems destined to remain obscure.

The Giant Sword as Solar Candle

Having demonstrated the presence of candle-sword imagery in medieval Irish and Norse texts, and in Norse the existence of female bearers of candle-weapons comparable to Grendel's mother, I turn now to a detailed examination of the evidence for a similar concept of the giant sword in *Beowulf*, and for its likely solar nature. This evidence, I emphasize, is subtle and implicit. As noted earlier, my hypothesis that the melting giant sword is implicitly likened to a melting candle is supported by a passage found only shortly earlier in the poem.

Soon after discovering the giant sword in the monsters' lair at the bottom of the mere, Beowulf used it to kill Grendel's mother, whereupon the *rodore* *candel* 'sky's candle' shone in the cave:

Geseah ða on searwum sigeeadig bil,
 ealdsweord eotenisc, ecgum þyhtig,
 wigena weorðmynd. Pæt wæs wæpna cyst,

108 Gunnell, 'Grýla', 39–40.

buton hit wæs mare ðonne ænig mon oðer
 to beadulace ætberan meahte,
 god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.
 He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga,
 hreoh ond heorogrim, hringmæl gebrægd,
 aldres orwena, yrringa sloh,
 þæt hire wið halse heard grapode,
 banhringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwod
 fægne flæschoman; heo on flet gecrong.
 Sweord wæs swatig, secg weorce gefeh.
 Lixte se leoma, leoht inne stod,
 efne swa of hefene hadre scineð
 rodores candel. He æfter recede wlat;
 hwearf þa be wealle, wæpen hafenade
 heard be hiltum Higelaces ðegn,
 yrre ond anræd. (1557–75)

He [Beowulf] saw then among the armour a victory-eager bill [i.e., sword], a giantish old-sword, doughty in its edges, the pride of warriors. It was the choicest of weapons, except that it was more [i.e., larger] than any other man might bear into battle-play [i.e., battle], good and splendid/well-equipped, the work of giants. He seized then the ringed/chained/belted(?) hilt, the champion of the Scyldingas, savage and sword-grim, drew the ring-marked (sword), despairing of life, [and] struck angrily, so that he/it gripped her hard by the neck, broke bone-rings [i.e., vertebrae]; the bill entirely penetrated the doomed body;¹⁰⁹ she fell on the floor. The sword was sweaty/bloody; the man/sword rejoiced in the deed. The radiance [*se leoma*] shone, light stood within, just as the sky's candle shines brightly from heaven. He looked along the hall; then he turned by the wall, holding the weapon hard by its hilt, Hygelac's thane, angry and resolute.

The kenning *rodores candel* appears only here in Old English poetry, but is echoed later in *Beowulf* when the hero returns home to Hygelac: *Woruldcandel scan, sigel suðan fus* 'The world-candle shone, the sun eager from the south' (1965–6).¹¹⁰ It denotes the sun,¹¹¹ which is described similarly in other, probably later Old English texts as *dægandel* 'day-candle', *friþcandel* 'peace-candle', *Godes candel* 'God's candle', *heofoncandel*

109 I.e., the sword beheaded her, as *Beowulf* later confirms (2138–40).

110 Cf. *Vǫluspá* 4: *sól skein sunnan* 'the sun shone from the south'.

111 So *KB*, 360, s.v. *candel*.

'heaven-candle',¹¹² *merecandel* 'mere/sea-candle', *swegelcandel* 'sky-candle', *wedercandel* 'weather-candle' and *wyncandel* 'joy-candle'.¹¹³

Additionally, *rodores candel* recalls the poet's earlier description of the sun at dawn as a *beorht beacen Godes* 'bright beacon of God' (570),¹¹⁴ which shone from the east after Beowulf's swimming-contest with Breca and killing of sea-monsters—an episode that foreshadows Beowulf's struggle with Grendel's mother. It also finds a significant (perhaps partly derived) parallel in *Grettis saga*, in which the men of Bárðardalr, Iceland attribute the eponymous hero's defeat of a she-troll to the light of dawn, which turned her to stone while the pair were wrestling.¹¹⁵ It seems clear, therefore, that whatever *se leoma* 'the radiance/light' was that shone in Grendel's lair after his mother's death, it is likened to the sun imagined as a burning candle.

The origin of this radiance, about which the poet appears artfully ambiguous, matters greatly for the purpose of this study. Various origins are possible and I shall examine more than one. They include:

- (a) The firelight or fiery light mentioned in lines 1516–7 (*fyrleoht geseah, / blacne leoman beorhte scinan* 'he [Beowulf] saw firelight, a pale [or 'brilliant'] light shining brightly'), which may be connected with the earlier reference to *fyr on flode* 'fire on/ in the flood' (1366).¹¹⁶ This light might be from a domestic fire. Alternatively, it might be from hellfire, the mere being a representation of Hell.¹¹⁷
- (b) An emanation from the severed head or decapitated torso of Grendel's mother, since it appears immediately after her beheading. As such, it might be a Germanic relative of the Avestan *x^varənah-* (*khvarnah*),¹¹⁸ a radiant force embodying

112 This word can also denote 'sun and moon' and the fiery pillar of *Exodus*.

113 For instances of these words, see *BT*, *BTS* and *DOE*.

114 The Cross is described in similar terms in another Old English poem; see M. Swanton (ed.), *The Dream of the Rood*, rev. edn. (Exeter, 1987), 93 (line 6), 98 (line 83), 99 (line 118).

115 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, 213.

116 Presumably at least partly a will-o'-the-wisp.

117 Cf. also the lake of fire of the Biblical *Book of Revelation*. Generally, on the Indo-European mythic theme of 'fire in water', see J. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, 1987), 277–83.

118 See M. N. Nagler, 'Beowulf in the Context of Myth', in J. D. Niles (ed.), *Old English Literature in Context: Ten Essays* (Cambridge, 1980), 143–56, 178–81 at 148.

divine sovereignty and heroic glory that resided in the waters of a mythical sea.¹¹⁹ Alternatively, it might derive from the sun. In that case the episode would echo, for example, an ancient Indian myth linked, as in *Beowulf*, to the release of fresh water:¹²⁰ by slaying the monstrous cobra *Vṛtra* 'Obstacle' and then its mother, *Dānu*, with a resounding or sun-like mace, the god *Indra* released the world's waters from captivity and gave rise, according to some accounts, to the sky, the sun and the dawn.¹²¹ If the body of Grendel's mother contained sunlight, this would explain why her blood was (arguably) so hot.¹²²

- (c) The light associated with Christ, especially during the Harrowing of Hell,¹²³ when he redeemed the righteous inhabitants of Hell by assuming the heat and light of the sun and using the sign of the Cross.¹²⁴ In the Old English translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (an imperfect text of which survives in the Southwick Codex) this light appears *on þære þeostra dymnysse ... swylce þær gylden sunna onæled wære* 'in the dimness of darknesses ... as if the golden sun were kindled there'.¹²⁵ The appearance of Christ's light in darkness is 'the central image' of Old English accounts of the Harrowing of Hell.¹²⁶

119 See A. Soudavar, *The Aura of Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship* (Costa Mesa, 2003), 101, 174, figs. 106 and 108.

120 By behaving Grendel and his mother, *Beowulf* is said to have cleansed the mere's waters.

121 See S. W. Jamison and J. P. Brereton (trans.), *The Rigveda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, 3 vols (Oxford, 2014), I, 134–6, II, 814–5; W. D. O'Flaherty, *The Rig Veda* (London, 1981), 148–51; L. Tepper, 'The Monster's Mother at Yuletide', in K. E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen (ed.), *Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe* (Leuven, 2001), 93–102 at 97–102; E. Lyle, 'The Hero Who Releases the Waters and Defeats the Flood Dragon', *Comparative Mythology* 1 (2015), 1–12.

122 See Chapter 15.

123 See e.g., G. R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf and the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester, 2000), 167–8.

124 S. J. Crawford (ed.), *The Gospel of Nicodemus* (Edinburgh, 1927), 17–8, 23; M. Herbert and M. McNamara (ed.), *Irish Biblical Apocrypha: Selected Texts in Translation* (London, 2004), 78, 82–3, 85; J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford, 1993), 191, 195.

125 Crawford, *Gospel*, 17. In the Greek original, the sun-like light appears in the darkness of the middle of the night; see B. D. Ehrman and Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford, 2011), 476–7.

126 M. B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 144.

(d) Light from gleaming gold, especially in view of parallels in Old Norse poetry.¹²⁷ In that case, it might be from the many treasures in the cave, among which were the splendid sword Hrunting, described not long before as *se beadoleoma* ‘the battle-light’ (1523), and the giant sword. Swords often shine or blaze in literature and mythology.¹²⁸ Compare especially the sword described as a *bjartr gunnlogi* ‘bright battle-flame’ with which the hero Grettir slew the giant *Gangr* ‘Walking One’ (compare *Grendel gongan* ‘Grendel walking’ in *Beowulf* 711) in an episode of his saga famous for its similarities to Beowulf’s fight with Grendel and his mother.¹²⁹

The poet’s purposefully allusive, ambiguous imagery—a key aspect of his ‘integrative genius’¹³⁰—enables more than one of these potential origins to coexist and to be evoked simultaneously. Taken together, the many analogues to this part of *Beowulf* in Old Norse texts underline, rather than dispel, this rich uncertainty, which is characteristic of mythological symbols. Upon close examination of the words of *Beowulf*, however, the giant sword appears the most immediately obvious source of the radiance.¹³¹ This point is of obvious importance for an identification of the melting giant sword with the image of a solar candle.

127 See C. Abram, ‘New Light on the Illumination of Grendel’s Mere’, *JEGP* 109 (2010), 198–216, <https://doi.org/10.1353/egp.0.0135>

128 In addition to the Old English, Old Norse and medieval Irish instances identified elsewhere in this study, note the flaming sword of *Genesis* 3:24; the blazing sword of Arthur in Welsh mythology; the sword called *Dyrnwyn* ‘White-Hilt’, also in Welsh tradition; the *Claidheamh Soluis* ‘Sword of Light’ of Irish and Scottish folklore; and the dazzlingly radiant hilts of El Cid’s swords in medieval Spanish tradition (see Chapter 6 n. 84). Also noteworthy is the German term *Flammenschwert*, literally ‘flame-sword’, for a sword whose blade has undulating edges; cf. English ‘flambard’ and ‘flamberge’.

129 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 216–7. On the term *gunnlogi*, see *LP* s.v.; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 51; P. A. Jorgensen, ‘Grendel, Grettir and Two Skaldic Stanzas’, *Scripta Islandica* 24 (1973), 54–61; and Chapter 12. There is some doubt whether *bjartr gunnlogi* describes Grettir’s *sax* ‘short sword’ or the wall-hung sword for which the giant reached unsuccessfully; but we may suspect that, originally at least, Grettir slew the giant with the latter weapon, which is comparable to the giant sword.

130 Nagler, ‘*Beowulf*’, 147.

131 At the corresponding point in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Sellic Spell*, a prose story in the style of a folk-tale on the subject of *Beowulf*, ‘it seemed to Beowulf [i.e., Beowulf] that the light came from the sword, and that the blade was on fire’; Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 377–8 (contrast Tolkien’s earlier version, p. 400).

Key to this nonexclusive identification is the presence in the passage quoted above of a small but crucial word: the definite article *se* in *se leoma* ‘the radiance’ (1570). This word is often overlooked in translations, but its presence favours identification of *se leoma* with a closely preceding subject. One candidate is the *fyrleoht*, the *blacne leoman*, of lines 1516–7, but it is not the most immediate, as *sweord* and *secg* appear in line 1569. In fact, we need not choose between these last two candidates, as the grammatical subject of the phrase *secg weorce gefeh* appears purposefully ambiguous: man (*secg*)¹³² and sword (*secg*)¹³³ are one in their moment of victory.¹³⁴ The implicit notion of a ‘living’ sword is reinforced by the ambiguous adjective *swatig*, which identifies the blade as both ‘sweaty’ like flesh and ‘bloody’; a ‘sweaty’ sword implies an extension of the man’s arm.¹³⁵ The description of the light as having arisen—literally, *stod* ‘stood’—in the cave, although unremarkable when viewed in isolation, also appears suggestive in context, given the surrounding references to Beowulf holding the huge sword firmly by its hilt, which is to say upright.

Attentive listeners would perceive another reason to identify *se leoma* with the giant sword. Although the simplex *leoma* does not denote a

132 *BT* s.v. *secg, es* (first entry); *OED* s.v. *segge* 1. This poetic word appears frequently in *Beowulf*.

133 *OED* s.v. *secg, e*; *OED* s.v. *sedge*, n.1. This word appears in *Beowulf* 684.

134 Cf. Nitzsche, ‘Structural Unity’, 294.

135 See especially my discussion in Chapter 5 of a prosthetic sword in an Old Norse saga. Note also Beowulf’s earlier report of how he *geræhte* ‘reached’ water-monsters with the point of his sword, killed them *þurh mine hand* ‘by my hand’ (556–8); see too my suggested interpretation, in Chapter 5, of Grendel’s arm as an *unheoru* ‘un/bad-sword’. Additionally, recall how Hrunting *agol grædig guðleoð* ‘sang a greedy war-song’ (1521–2) on Grendel’s mother’s head, as if vocalizing for Beowulf. Swords implicitly speak—and therefore have a form of life—in other Anglo-Saxon texts, such as riddles, including two early Latin instances by Aldhelm (c. 639–709) and Tatwine (c. 670–734), in which the weapons describe themselves in the first person; see *SASE*, 156–7. Generally on the notion of animate swords and swords with identities, see D. A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore, 2000), 208–9; S. E. Brunning, ‘The “Living” Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: An Interdisciplinary Study’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2013); S. Brunning, *The Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: Experience, Identity, Representation* (Woodbridge, 2019), 139–56; S. Brunning, ‘Crossing Edges? “Person-Like” Swords in Anglo-Saxon England’, in S. Semple, C. Orsini and S. Mui (ed.), *Life on the Edge: Social, Political and Religious Frontiers in Early Medieval Europe* (Wendeburg, 2017), 409–18; M. Pearce, ‘The Spirit of the Sword and Spear’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 23 (2013), 55–67; *SASE* 5–7, 414–23; *MIFL*, motif F997.1 ‘Sword is spoken to as to human being’.

sword elsewhere in *Beowulf* or other Old English texts, it does appear in a sword-compound attested only in *Beowulf*. One instance occurs only shortly earlier, as we have just seen, in a closely comparable context: Hrunting is *se beadoleoma* (1523) as it strikes Grendel's mother's neck.¹³⁶ Also significant is a preceding instance of a synonymous compound in the Finnsburg-episode of *Beowulf* when a vengeful Hengest receives a sword either described as a *hildeleoma* 'battle-light' or named *Hildeleoma*:¹³⁷

Hengest ða gyt
wælfagne winter wunode mid Finne.
He unhlitme eard gemunde,
þeah þe *ne* meahte on mere drifan
hringedstefnan— holm storme weol,
won wið winde, winter yþe beleac
isgebinde— oþ ðæt oþer com
gear in geardas, swa nu gyt deð,
þa ðe syngales sele bewitiað,
wuldortorhtan weder. Ða wæs winter scacen,
fæger foldan bearm. Fundode wrecca,
gist of geardum; he to gymwraçe
swiðor þohte þonne to sælade,
gif he torngemot þurhteon mihte,
þæt he Eotena bearm inne gemunde.
Swa he ne forwyrnde woroldrædenne
þonne him Hunlafing hildeleoman,
billa selest, on bearm dyde,
þæs wæron mid Eotenum ecge cuðe. (1127–45)

Hengest then still dwelt with Finn that water-hostile [*or* slaughter-stained] winter. He remembered his homeland not reluctantly(?), although he could not drive the ring-prowed ship on the 'mere' [*mere*]*—*the sea welled with storm, dark [*won*] against the wind, winter locked the waves in an ice-binding—until another spring came into the courts, as it still does now, those [seasons] that always keep to their times, gloriously bright weathers. Then

136 For the suggestion of a substantial degree of underlying identity between Hrunting and the giant sword, see Chapter 16.

137 This compound, unique to *Beowulf*, appears only once more, in the plural, denoting sword-like flames of dragon-fire (*hildeleoman* 2583).

winter was departed, the earth's bosom fair. The exile was eager to go, the guest from the courts; he thought more especially about revenge for injury than about the sea-voyage, whether he could bring about a hostile meeting, in that he inwardly remembered the children of the Jutes/giants. Thus he did not reject the way of the world when Hunlafing placed a 'battle-light'/ Hildeleoma, the best of bills [i.e., swords], in his lap, whose edges were known among the Jutes/giants.

Here the appearance of the *hildeleoma* known among Jutes follows shortly after the arrival of the vernal sun and the thaw that enabled the sword's use against the Jutes, a people whose Old English name, *Eotan*, was apparently confused with the similar-sounding *boten* 'giant'.¹³⁸ A comparable association appears following Beowulf's killing of Grendel's mother, only in reverse: the appearances of the giant sword known to, and used against, the giants, and of *se leoma* come shortly before the vernal thaw, and the sword's use brings about the end, rather than a renewal, of hostilities. This parallel is underlined by a foreshadowing in the quoted passage of Grendel's mere (*mere* 1130)—a frosty, ice-bound, yet also windy, stormy and turbulent, lake from which a wave ascended *won* 'dark' to the clouds (1374). Also, in the presentation of a (or the) *hildeleoma* to Hengest by *Hunlafing* (assuming this name denotes a man), there is presumably a foreshadowing of the presentation of the *beadoleoma* Hrunting to Beowulf by (*H*)*unferð* son of *Ecglaf*.¹³⁹

Another comparable use of *-leoma* appears in a related Old English poem, the *Finnsburh Fragment*. There we find that *Swurdleoma stod, swylce eal Finn[e]s Buruh fyrenu wære* 'Sword-light stood/arose, as if all of Finn's stronghold were on fire' (35–6).¹⁴⁰

Support for this interpretation of *se leoma* in *Beowulf* is also found later in the poem. There other luminous swords appear, albeit less dramatically. In Beowulf's description of how the Heaðo-Beardan will be spurred into seeking vengeance against the Danes, he imagines them being provoked by the sight of their dead kinsmen's swords glistening at

138 On this issue, see Neidorf, *Transmission*, 85–6.

139 *Unferð* appears in the *Beowulf*-manuscript as *Hunferð*, but probably as a result of scribal addition of *H-* at an unknown date; see Neidorf, *Transmission*, 76–7. For a proposal that *Hunlafing* actually *is* (*H*)*unferð*, and that Hrunting is the sword mentioned in this passage, see L. E. Nicholson, 'Hunlafing and the Point of the Sword', in L. E. Nicholson and D. W. Frese (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard* (Notre Dame, 1975), 50–61.

140 KB, 284.

the sides of their killers: *On him gladiað gomeþra lafe, I heard ond hringmael* ‘On them the leavings [i.e., swords] of old men will shine, hard and ring-marked’ (2036–7). Later still, before fighting the dragon, Beowulf says he had repaid the treasures that Hygelac had given him *leohtan sweorde* ‘with a light/radiant sword’ (2492).¹⁴¹

Sörli and *Sigrljómi* ‘Victory-Light’

Medieval Norse texts lend further support to the identification of *se leoma* with the giant sword. In Old Norse the cognate masculine noun *ljómi* ‘(flash of) light, beam’ appears both as a simplex for ‘sword’ and in ‘sword’-kennings.¹⁴² Of special interest is the sword *Sigrljómi* ‘Victory-Light’ found in *Sörla saga sterka* ‘The Saga of Sörli the Strong’, a tale attested in seventeenth-century manuscripts but possibly dating from the fifteenth.

According to this saga, *Sigrljómi* was a sword formerly owned by King Hrólfur Kraki,¹⁴³ a figure probably identifiable with Hroðulf, Hroðgar’s nephew in *Beowulf*, and potentially therefore a recipient of the giant sword’s hilt, perhaps attached to a new blade. The giant sword is similarly identified with victory, being *sigeeadig* ‘victory-blessed’ (1557)—although this is a commonplace quality of a great sword, it may be added that OE *sige* and ON *sigr* are cognate.

It is not just the name *Sigrljómi* and its former owner that invite comparison with the giant sword. Events involving *Sigrljómi* parallel those of Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother.

As first identified in the saga, *Sigrljómi* is the sword of Högni, enemy of the titular Sörli (a Beowulf-like figure), and it is paired with an impenetrable shirt.¹⁴⁴ A complication arises later, however, during the climactic fight between these two. Each killed the other’s mount with his sword, but their armour prevented them wounding each other. Consequently:

141 Elsewhere in Old English literature, note the shining sword, with gleaming hilt, of the mysterious sea-faring dragonslayer *weallende Wulf* ‘welling/surging Wolf’, which he left in a poisonous land to which no man could venture, as described in the poem *Solomon and Saturn II* (34–46); D. Anlezark (ed.), *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge, 2009), 80–1; Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, 323–33.

142 LP s.v. *ljómi*; PTP, 800–1.

143 FSN, III, 398.

144 FSN, III, 398.

Nú sér Sörli, at eigi muni tjá at skipta lengr höggum við Högna. Snarar hann þá sverðinu langt frá sér í burt ok ræðr þegar á Högna, en hann grípr í mót af öllu afli, ok sviptast þeir nú harðliga.¹⁴⁵

Sörli now sees that it would not avail to trade blows any longer with Högni. He then throws the sword a long way away from himself and at once attacks Högni, and he grapples with him with all his might, and now they wrestle harshly.

Sörli tries to haul Högni into a very deep brook nearby, but Högni manages to push him to the ground and then leaps on him and knees him in the stomach. The story continues:

Þá mælti Högni: ‘Fjarri mér er nú sverðit Sigrljómi, er ek þess helzt við þarf, ok mun þat þykkja illa at unnit, ef ek bít þik á barkann, sem tröll gera, ok ef svá er sem sagt er, at þú sért manna hugaðastr ok fullhugi kallaðr, þá liggðu hér nú kyrr ok bið mín, á meðan ek tek sverðit.’

Stóð Högni þá upp ok gekk þangat, sem sverðit lá ...¹⁴⁶

Then Högni said: ‘Far from me now is the sword Sigrljómi, when I have most need of it, and it will seem ill-done if I bite into your windpipe as trolls do, and if it is as is said, that you are the most courageous of men and called a dauntless man, then lie still here now and await me, while I take the sword.’

Högni stood up then and went where the sword lay ...

Högni then spared Sörli’s life, as Sörli had previously offered mercy to Högni’s father, and the two came to peaceful terms.

The quoted passage raises an obvious question, in that when Sörli throws *sverðinu* ‘the sword’ far away *frá sér* ‘from himself’ before grappling with Högni, it is presumably his *own* sword that he discards, having found that it would not bite. Consequently, the reader is left wondering how Högni’s sword, Sigrljómi, came to be lying on the ground far from him. We might perhaps infer that Högni had similarly cast his sword away before he began wrestling, but in lieu of any explicit statement to this effect the reader gets the impression that Sörli’s discarded sword is somehow now the sword Sigrljómi which Högni goes to fetch. It is tempting to compare the implicit association

¹⁴⁵ FSN, III, 407.

¹⁴⁶ FSN, III, 407.

(discussed further in Chapter 16) between Hrunting—the *beadoleama* ‘battle-light’ which Beowulf discards when he finds it cannot harm Grendel’s mother (equivalent to Sörli’s discarded sword)—and the *sigeeadig* giant sword highly suggestive of *se leoma*. At least, the potential for confusion and conflation is clear.

This fight between Sörli and Högni also echoes an earlier encounter in the same saga between Sörli and a trollish crone, from whom the hero obtained his sword and some impenetrable armour. The earlier tussle is itself analogous to that between Beowulf and Grendel’s mother.¹⁴⁷ In summary (and with comparisons to *Beowulf* and the above-quoted episode in parenthesis), that encounter, along with an associated second fight with an ogress, proceeds as follows.¹⁴⁸

Sörli was the younger son of a Norwegian king and a female descendant of the *Æsir* (the Norse heathen gods) called *Dagný* ‘New Day’. He was extraordinarily strong (like Beowulf). Once, when he and his men were sailing home, they lost their way in dense fog. They disembarked in a strange land (compare Beowulf’s sea-journey to Denmark). Sörli then passed through woods by a mountain (compare the *fyrgeholt* ‘mountain-wood’ of *Beowulf* 1393). He came to a large cave (compare the cave-like home of Grendel and his mother).

Inside the cave Sörli saw a terrible *jötunn* ‘giant’ (compare Grendel as *eoten* 761) who was *liggja í sinni rekkju* ‘lying on his bed’ (as Grendel, albeit lifeless, was *on ræste ... licgan* ‘lying on a bed’, 1585–6).¹⁴⁹ Sörli also saw an old, initially unnamed woman, who was rather *stórmannliga* ‘like a great man’ (compare Grendel’s anonymous, aged giantess of a mother and her masculine aspect).¹⁵⁰ She was butchering the flesh of men and horses (compare Grendel and doubtless his dagger-wielding mother as maneaters).

Sörli overheard the old woman calling the giant *Skrímnir/Skrímnir*,¹⁵¹ and Skrímnir claiming responsibility for the great fog and wind that

147 See Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear’s Son*, 64–9. Parallels with Hjálmpér’s aforementioned adventures will also be apparent.

148 FSN, III, 369–79.

149 FSN, III, 373.

150 FSN, III, 373.

151 *Skrímnir* in FSN, III, but as the name does not appear in poetry in this saga the quantity of its first ‘i’ cannot be determined. This was also the name of the giant encountered by Hjálmpér. I remark on its possible significance in Chapter 14. Note also the rather similarly named giant *Skrýmir*, whose glove and food-bag I compare to Grendel’s glove in Chapter 5.

had brought the men there (compare Grendel's association with mist and wind in *Beowulf* 162, 1358, 1360).

Next Sörli entered the cave and quickly slew Skrimnir on his bed by thrusting his sword into the giant's jaws (compare Beowulf beheading Grendel on his bed, albeit *after* killing Grendel's mother).

The crone then attacked Sörli with a *skálm* (compare Grendel's mother attacking with a *seax*); its point (*oddrinn*) pierced Sörli's breast (*brjóstit*), but apparently did no major damage (similarly, the *seax* failed to kill Beowulf, as his chainmail *breostnet* 'breast-net' resisted its *ord* 'point', 1547–9).¹⁵²

She attacked Sörli repeatedly, and had he not evaded each blow *hefði hann dauða beðit* 'she would have been the death of him' (compare Beowulf *aldres orwena* 'despairing of life', 1565).¹⁵³ She had fiery breath and eyes (compare Grendel's mother's possible internal heat and her son's eyes which gleamed like fire).

Sörli threw down his sword (as Beowulf discarded Hrunting, 1531–2), and rushed beneath *tröllkonuna* 'the troll-woman' (compare Grendel's mother as giantess).¹⁵⁴ She sank her claws into him (compare Grendel's mother's attempt to pierce Beowulf with her fingers, 1505).

They wrestled (as did Beowulf and Grendel's mother). She tripped on the edge of a chasm (compare Sörli's attempt to wrestle Högni into the very deep brook). They both fell into it as she held on to Sörli's hair and chest, though he landed on top (compare Beowulf's stumble and fall, Grendel's mother's setting upon him, and his subsequent rise, 1543–56).

Tók Sörli þá báðum höndum fyrir kverkar henni 'Sörli then seized her with both hands around her throat' and did not let go (compare how Beowulf *hire wið halse heard grapode* 'gripped her [Grendel's mother] hard by the neck', 1566).¹⁵⁵ Next Sörli kned her in the stomach (as Högni did to him), and all her strength left her.

She pleaded for her life, which Sörli granted on condition that she fetch him, within a month, armour that no sword could pierce and *sverð þat, er eins bíti stál sem stein* 'the sword which bites steel as well as stone'.¹⁵⁶ (Compare Högni requesting that Sörli wait while he fetched the

152 FSN, III, 374.

153 FSN, III, 374.

154 FSN, III, 374.

155 FSN, III, 375.

156 FSN, III, 375. Here *stein* 'stone' is probably a mistake for *strá* 'straw' (see below).

sword, as this seemed more honourable than biting him in the windpipe like a troll). She agreed and subsequently named herself *Mána* 'Moon'.¹⁵⁷

When Sörli returned to her cave to claim his prizes he found *Mána*, who is now his 'lady friend' (compare how Sörli and Högni became friends),¹⁵⁸ losing a fight against another ogress. Together Sörli and *Mána* attacked this second ogress, whom he killed by running her through with his sword. *Mána* then presented him with the requested armour and a *sverð bitrligt* 'sharp sword', which were apparently elsewhere in her cave (compare the armour and the giant sword in Grendel's cave).¹⁵⁹ She explained that *sverðit bítr allt eins stál sem strá* 'the sword bites everything, steel as well as straw' (as the giant sword no doubt would, too).¹⁶⁰

For all the similarities noted above, there is ostensibly a major difference between Sörli's fight with *Mána* and Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother. In *Beowulf*, the hero kills the ogress by decapitating her, whereas in the saga, when Sörli might have strangled *Mána*, he spares her life (as Högni later spared his). This difference appears superficial, however. For it is clear that the saga-episode presents a *symbolic death* of the female monster:¹⁶¹ from henceforth *Mána*'s hostility to Sörli is no more and she becomes his friend.¹⁶² Probably we have here an adaptation of an earlier form of the story, in which the giantess died physically (as in *Beowulf*), to a common motif in the legendary sagas, namely that of the giantess as foster-mother to the hero.¹⁶³ That Sörli originally killed *Mána* (or her forebear in an earlier form of the story) seems likely from the narrative redundancy of the pair's subsequent fight against the unnamed ogress; *Mána*'s implacable hostility and physical death at the hands of the hero have probably been transferred to the second ogress.¹⁶⁴

157 FSN, III, 375. I examine the significance of her name and of the one-month period in Chapter 14.

158 Also compare Vargeisa as Hjálmpér's 'female friend' in *Hjálmpés saga*.

159 FSN, III, 379.

160 FSN, III, 379.

161 As was the case with Vargeisa.

162 Rather as Vargeisa became Ál(f)sól.

163 On this motif, see H. R. Ellis, 'Fostering by Giants in Old Norse Saga Literature', *MÆ* 10 (1941), 70–85; L. L. Gallo, 'The Giantess as Foster-Mother in Old Norse Literature', *SS* 78 (2006), 1–20.

164 Cf. McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 139.

However we explain these parallels between *Sörla saga sterka* and *Beowulf* (shared use of a common story-pattern or influence from *Beowulf* on the saga, or something of both?), they increase the likelihood that the implicitly radiant Sigrljómi and the giant sword are closely related. So, too, does the testimony of the thirteenth- or fourteenth-century *Hrólfs saga kraka* 'Hrólfr Kraki's Saga', in which the king's sword is called *Gullinhjalti* 'Golden Hilt',¹⁶⁵ a name corresponding closely to the designation of the giant sword's handle as *gylden hilt* '(the) golden hilt' or perhaps *Gyldenhilt* 'Golden Hilt',¹⁶⁶ when presented to Hroðgar in *Beowulf* (1677).

Whether or not Sigrljómi and Gullinhjalti are essentially the same weapon, the probable kinship between *Sigrljómi* 'Victory Light' and the giant sword increases the likelihood of a degree of equivalence between the victorious giant sword and *se leoma* (and Hrunting as *beadoleoma*). This finding, in turn, increases the justification for relating the image of the melting giant sword to the *Beowulf*-poet's preceding reference to a radiant solar candle.

The Giant Sword as Paschal Candle

We have seen evidence both internal and external to *Beowulf* to suggest that a prime source of the sun-like light which shone immediately after the beheading of Grendel's mother came at least partly from the triumphal giant sword. This conclusion is not new.¹⁶⁷ To my knowledge, however, nobody has linked the image of the giant sword shining like a solar candle with that of its melting with icicles shortly afterwards.

165 *FSN*, I, 68–9; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 51; cf. North, *Origins*, 52. Another sword that belonged to Hrólfr was *Sköfnungr* 'Polished One', which, according to his saga, was the best in the Northlands, rang loudly when it struck bone, and was buried with him; see *FSN*, I, 90, 99, 105; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 60. Two other sagas record that the sun must not shine on its hilt, but without saying why; see Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Laxdæla saga*, ÍF 5 (Reykjavík, 1934), 172; Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), *Vatnsdæla saga*, ÍF 8 (Reykjavík, 1939), 235–6. For discussions of this sword, see *SASE* and Miller, *Epic Hero*, 211–2.

166 Cf. Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 383 (Gildenhilt).

167 See A. J. Wyatt (ed.), *Beowulf with the Finnsburg Fragment*, new edn., rev. R. W. Chambers (London, 1933), 78 n. to line 1570; M. Puhvel, 'The Deicidal Otherworld Weapon in Celtic and Germanic Mythic Tradition', *Folklore* 83 (1972), 210–9 at 215; Puhvel, *Beowulf*, 25–38; Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, 308–9. For an argument to the contrary, see G. Bolens, 'The Limits of Textuality: Mobility and Fire Production in Homer and *Beowulf*', *OT* 16 (2001), 107–28 at 121–2.

Nonetheless, it is a natural analogical extension that a sword which shines like a candle should melt like a candle. It appears equally natural that a sword which melts into icicles and is linked with sunlight should suggest the melting of ice under the vernal sun.

Consequently, the likely relationship of the image of the melting giant sword to the imagery of Easter, the Cross and baptism has apparently gone unnoticed.¹⁶⁸ Scholars have argued persuasively, to my mind, for the presence of Christian allusions in the portrayal of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother in a fiery mere, especially in relation to the imagery of the Harrowing of Hell, baptism and Holy Week.¹⁶⁹ But, in my view, they have failed to suggest that the poet might delicately intimate the most prominent image of the Easter season, one closely linked to its baptismal ceremonies. For if the melting giant sword is imagined as a melting candle, in this context it seems reasonable to suggest that the poet may invite the listener to think of not just any candle but the most significant candle, the Paschal Candle.¹⁷⁰ There are many reasons to entertain this proposal, though I stress that in presenting the following list I am in no way advocating a point-for-point allegorical interpretation of this part of *Beowulf*. I merely raise what is, in my eyes, an attractive possible significance to the giant sword-candle.

168 See, though, M. B. McNamee, 'Beowulf—An Allegory of Salvation?', *JEGP* 59 (1960), 190–207 at 200, 202 on the Gloucester candlestick. If OE *eastre* 'Easter' derives, as Bede states, from *Eostre*, 'the name of a goddess whose festival was celebrated at the vernal equinox' (*OED* s.v. *Easter* n.1), this suggests a connection with the sun in spring, especially as *Eostre* was 'originally the dawn-goddess' (*ibid.*). The dawn sun rises in the east (a related word), as was stated earlier in *Beowulf* when, immediately after the hero had killed a sea-monster (comparable to Grendel's mother) with a *hildebil* 'battle-bill' (comparable to the giant sword), its appearance is accompanied by the calming of the sea (as it is after the killing of Grendel's mother): *Leoht eastan com, / beorht beacan Godes, brimu swaþredon* 'Light came from the east, the bright beacon of God, the seas/waters became still' (569–70).

169 See A. Cabaniss, 'Beowulf and the Liturgy', *JEGP* 54 (1955), 195–201; L. E. Nicholson, 'The Literal Meaning and Symbolic Structure of *Beowulf*', *C&M* 25 (1964), 151–201 (168: 'a consistent use of baptismal symbolism derived largely from the Easter vigil service of Holy Saturday'); McNamee, 'Beowulf'; A. A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry* (New Haven, 1972), 207–9; V. Black and B. Bethune, 'Beowulf and the Rites of Holy Week', *Scintilla: A Student Journal for Medievalists* 1 (1984), 5–23; Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, 167–9.

170 For the possibility that the image of the giant sword as a large burning candle also has a basis in a heathen fertility ritual co-opted by the monks of Abingdon in the mid-tenth century, see Chapter 7.

First, although detailed information about the Anglo-Saxon Easter liturgy before the tenth century has not survived,¹⁷¹ the *Regularis concordia*, a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon code of Benedictine monastic law, records that the Paschal Candle was lit *Sabbato Sancto hora nona* 'on Holy Saturday at the hour of None'.¹⁷² This was the hour, exactly or approximately, at which the mysterious light shone in the mere. We can tell this because, following the beheading of Grendel very soon after the death of his mother, we learn that the men waiting for Beowulf at the mere's surface saw blood in the water *sona* 'at once' (1591) and assumed him dead, whereupon the poet adds starkly *Da com non dæg*es 'Then had come [or 'came'] the ninth hour of the day' (1600).¹⁷³ This hour also (and more obviously) matches the time of Christ's death on Good Friday and the time of the sun's reappearance: *Matthew* 27:45, *Mark* 15:33 and *Luke* 23:44 record that during the Crucifixion the land was darkened from the sixth hour until the ninth, when Christ died; and *Luke* 23:45 states that during this time the sun was obscured (*obscuratus est sol*). In other words, the sun reappeared at, or soon after, the ninth hour. In *Beowulf*, the sun's reappearance is represented by the sudden shining of the radiance like the 'sky's candle' in the giants' lair, an image also linked to Christ's solar appearance during the Harrowing,¹⁷⁴ and by the hero's emergence from the mere soon afterwards bearing the giant sword's golden hilt.

It might also be worth noting that the *Regularis concordia* also records that the Paschal Candle was lit by a *hastam cum imagine serpentis* 'spear/staff with the image of a serpent', more specifically by the *candela, quae in ore serpentis infixata est* 'candle which is fixed in the serpent's mouth'.¹⁷⁵ At the risk of proposing a parallel too far, this is perhaps suggestive of Beowulf's candle-sword shining immediately after contact with the neck of Grendel's sword-greedy mother, a monster probably akin to Norse composite females and huge mythological serpents like Leviathan,¹⁷⁶

171 Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 145.

172 Dom T. Symons, *The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (New York, 1953), 47 (§48).

173 On these words, see Owen-Crocker, *Four Funerals*, 168–9.

174 Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 151 observes that several references to the Harrowing appear in the blessing of the Paschal Candle in the so-called *Gelasian Sacramentary*, the oldest manuscript of which dates from the eighth century.

175 Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 39 (§41), 47 (§48). On this peculiar rite, see A. J. MacGregor, *Fire and Light in the Western Triduum: Their Use at Tenebrae and at the Paschal Vigil* (Collegeville, 1992), 259–66; Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 121, 156.

176 See Chapter 15.

who inhabited a mere invested with serpents—*wyrmcynnnes fela, sellice sædracan ... wyrmes* ‘many of snake-kind, strange sea-dragons ... snakes’ (1425–30)—and whose hot blood arguably contributed to the melting of the giant sword’s blade. We may recall, too, that in *Hjálmpés saga* the radiant candle-sword Snarvendill, which appears comparable to the giant sword, emerges from Vargeisa’s *mouth*; there is, furthermore, evidence that other Norse monsters comparable to Grendel’s mother had fiery breath.¹⁷⁷

Second, although the Paschal Candle has varied in size and weight down the centuries, it has invariably been the largest and heaviest ecclesiastical candle.¹⁷⁸ Evidence for its size in Anglo-Saxon England seems to be lacking, but in later centuries it was sometimes remarkably big.¹⁷⁹ Beowulf’s giant sword, which no other man could have wielded, was undoubtedly the largest and heaviest sword. If it is likened to a candle, it would make sense for it to be likened to a giant one.

Third, the lit Paschal Candle was traditionally dipped into and removed from water, specifically that of the baptismal font—a rite recorded by Alcuin.¹⁸⁰ If my line of thinking in subsequent chapters is correct, the giant sword did not originate in the mere, but was illicitly stored there following its theft or arrogation. Subsequently, Beowulf emerged from the waters of Grendel’s mere bearing its hilt in an episode suggestive of baptism.

Fourth, the Paschal Candle was traditionally made from beeswax, which was often equated with the flesh of Christ.¹⁸¹ For the late Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 950 to c. 1010), *cereus Christi*

177 The Old Norse terms *ímigustr* and *ímugustr* for ‘disgust’ (CV) mean literally ‘giant’s gust’, with *ími-/ímu-* deriving from *ím* ‘embers’. Note also the monstrous she-cat in *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* ‘The Tale of Ormr Stórolfsson’, from whose eyes, nose and mouth fire seemed to burn; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (ed.), *Harðar saga, ÍF* 13 (Reykjavík, 1991), 409.

178 In the twelfth century it was known as the *cereum magnum* ‘great candle’; see P. M. Girard, *A Textual History and Theological Reflection on the Inscription of the Paschal Candle* (Lewiston, 2004), 28.

179 See M. B. Freeman, ‘Lighting the Easter Candle’, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 3 (1945), 194–200 at 198; MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 309–19.

180 Freeman, ‘Lighting’, 196, 198; MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 477.

181 Girard, *Textual History*, 128–50, who concludes that ‘the beeswax of the Paschal Candle has been used as an allegory for the sinless flesh of Christ in the West since the early Middle Ages’ (150); MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 408. In the *Ex(s)ultet*, a hymn sung in praise of the Paschal Candle in the Roman rite, the candle is identified as an object, derived *de operibus apum* ‘from the labours of bees’, whose flame is fed by *liquantibus ceris* ‘melting wax’ which *apis mater eduxit* ‘the mother-bee brought

humanitatem praefigurat ‘the [Paschal] candle stands for the humanity of Christ’.¹⁸² As noted earlier, the blade of the giant sword is described as ‘sweaty’, as if it were human flesh. Also, as suggested previously, swords may sometimes have been coated with wax to help prevent them rusting.¹⁸³ In addition, scholars have often noted similarities between Beowulf (‘Bee(?)–Wolf’) and Christ, the plainest being the poem’s reference in this episode to ‘the ninth hour of the day’.

Fifth, the Paschal Candle was imagined as the world in microcosm by Ennodius (d. 521),¹⁸⁴ a writer whose works were known in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁸⁵ In *Beowulf*, the melting of the giant sword with icicles evokes an image of the thawing of a frozen world.

Sixth, from an early date the Paschal Candle was associated with spiritual purification, particularly of water; hence its dipping in the font. Additionally, as part of the blessing of this candle, the early eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon *Missal of Robert of Jumièges* records that *Huius ... sanctificatio noctis ... culpas lauat* ‘The sanctification of this night ... washes away sins’,¹⁸⁶ a passage also found in the *Sarum Missal*.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Paschal Candle was traditionally used to fumigate possessions, ward off the Devil and prevent bad weather.¹⁸⁸ Correspondingly, the giant sword’s melting is concomitant with the purification and calming of the mere’s waters—*waeron yðgebland eal gefaelsod* ‘the wave-blendings were all cleansed’ (1620)—and with the implicit arrival of good weather.¹⁸⁹

Seventh, the Paschal Candle was traditionally often held in an ornate metal, stone or wooden candlestick, adorned with symbolic scenes. Similarly, Beowulf’s giant sword had an inscribed, decorated hilt.

The idea that a prominent Christian image is alluded to at this point in the poem also receives general support from various Old Norse

forth’ (M. Martin, ed. and trans., ‘Exsultet’, *Thesaurus Precum Latinarum* (1998–2016), <http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/Exsultet.html>).

182 C. A. Jones, *Ælfric’s Letter to the Monks of Evesham* (Cambridge, 1998), 132–3 (§46).

183 See Chapter 3 n. 5.

184 MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 302–3.

185 See M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), 171, 301.

186 H. A. Wilson (ed.), *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges* (London, 1896), 91. Unless otherwise stated, translations from Latin texts are mine.

187 J. W. Legg (ed.), *The Sarum Missal edited from Three Early Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1916), 118.

188 MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 403–5.

189 See further Chapter 9.

analogues to Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, though none contains a clear candle-sword. These analogues link the hero's victory to his adoption or furtherance of Christianity, or otherwise follow up a monster's death with a Christian reference:

- (a) In the probably mid-fourteenth-century Icelandic *Orms þáttr Stórolfssonar* 'Tale of Ormr Stórolfsson', the hero slays a monstrous she-cat and her son after vowing to undertake a pilgrimage to Rome.¹⁹⁰
- (b) In the Icelandic folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi* 'Gullbrá and Skeggi', the hero, having remembered that Þórr failed to help him during his first encounter with the witch Gullbrá, vows before his second meeting with her to build a church. A great light then shines into her eyes, turning her to stone.¹⁹¹
- (c) In *Grettis saga*, the hero, having been abandoned by a priest, immediately takes the bones of two men that he found in a giant's lair to a church (compare the Harrowing of Hell). With them he took a stick on which he inscribed two stanzas in runes, the second stanza culminating in the reference to a *bjartr gunnlogi* 'bright battle-flame'.¹⁹²
- (d) In the Icelandic *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* 'Tale of Þorsteinn Bull's Leg', which probably dates from the fourteenth century, the eponymous hero and another man kill a troll-woman called Skjaldvör after promising to accept the Christian faith of Óláfr Tryggvason.¹⁹³ As soon as Þorsteinn made his promise, *kemr geisli í skálann ógurliga bjartr ok stendr þvert framan í augun kerlingar* 'a terribly bright beam comes into the hall [i.e., of Skjaldvör] and streams [literally 'stands across'] in front of the

190 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 417.

191 Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, I, 150. In Norse tradition, giants and other nocturnal or chthonic beings are often turned to stone when exposed to sunlight. We shall encounter more instances of this phenomenon later.

192 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 216–7.

193 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 363–5; the story is translated in Viðar Hreinsson (ed.), *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 Tales*, 5 vols (Reykjavík, 1997), IV, 340–54. For discussion, see A. L. Binns, 'The Story of Þorsteinn Uxafót', *SBVS* 14 (1953–7), 36–60; E. A. Rowe, 'Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts, Helga þáttr Þórissonar, and the Conversion Þættir', *SS* 76 (2004), 459–74 at 459–65. Óláfr is elsewhere called *miskunnar sólar geisli* 'beam of the sun of mercy'; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 363 n. 2.

eyes of the old woman [i.e., Skjaldvör].¹⁹⁴ She immediately lost all strength, so that the men were eventually able to break her neck.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, when Þorsteinn first came to Skjaldvör's bed-closet, he saw that *þar brann ljós á kertistiku* 'there burned a light on a candlestick', which, after taking the sword that hung beside a shield above where she lay in bed, he extinguished.¹⁹⁶ Here the candle and the sword might relate to Beowulf's candle-sword.

- (e) In an episode from the probably fourteenth-century Icelandic *Harðar saga Grímkellsonar* 'Saga of Hörðr Grímkellson', the eponymous hero and a Gotlandic prince called *Hróarr* (cognate with OE *Hroðgar*)¹⁹⁷ set out to raid the burial-mound of an undead viking with magical powers called *Sóti* 'Sooty'.¹⁹⁸ Outside the mound Hörðr told another companion, Geirr, that he should *hafi með sér eld ok vax, — því at hvárttveggja hefir mikla náttúru með sér* 'have with him fire and wax — "because each has great powers integrally"'.¹⁹⁹ Hörðr then entered using a sword given to him by a certain *Björn* 'Bear' (thought to be Óðinn incognito, but compare Beowulf as 'Bee-Wolf', i.e., 'Bear?'), while Hróarr remained outside. Inside, Hörðr and Geirr felt an earthquake before the lights went out. They noticed, however, a *skrimingr lítill* 'little glimmer',²⁰⁰ by which they discerned their foe. After exchanging verses, Hörðr and Sóti wrestled, until Hörðr told Geirr *tendra vaxkertit ok vita, hve Sóta brygði við þat. En er ljósit bar yfir Sóta, ómætti hann, ok fell hann niðr* 'to light the wax-candle and find out how Sóti would react to that. And when the light came over Sóti, he lost his strength and fell down.'²⁰¹ When Hörðr told Geirr to bring the light again, Sóti disappeared into ground. Hörðr then took

194 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 363.

195 I examine this episode further in Chapter 14.

196 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 360.

197 *Hróarr* is also a giant-name; *PTP*, 722–3.

198 Cf. Grendel; also Surtr, on whom see my remarks in Chapter 8.

199 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 41.

200 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 41. Cf. my discussion of *Skrimnir/Skrinnir* and similar giant-names in Chapter 14.

201 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 42.

Sóti's sword and helmet, which were *inu mestu gersimar* 'the greatest treasures'.²⁰² This story is ostensibly heathen, but its paganism may be superficial, as the crucial candle suggests Christianity.²⁰³ At any rate, if Óðinn's gift of a sword (which is not used to fight Sóti)²⁰⁴ corresponds to Unferð's loan of Hrunting (which proves useless against Grendel's mother),²⁰⁵ this encourages comparison of the conquering candle to the radiant giant sword, even if the correspondence is blurred by Hörðr's separate taking of Sóti's splendid blade.

202 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsón, *Harðar saga*, 43.

203 This is also the view of Binns, 'Story', 58–9.

204 Cf. P. Jorgensen, 'The Gift of the Useless Weapon in *Beowulf* and the Icelandic Sagas', *ANF* 94 (1979), 82–90.

205 As well as being donors of 'useless' swords, Óðinn and Unferð are both kinslayers and instigators of strife. Additionally, as Óðinn is a *þulr* 'sage' in the Eddic poem *Hávamál* 'The Sayings of Hávi' (80, 111, 134, 142), so Unferð is a *þyle* 'orator, spokesman, sage' in *Beowulf* (1165, 1456).

4. The Giant Sword and the Cross

We have seen that the melting giant sword of *Beowulf* may well subtly suggest a melting candle, perhaps even the Paschal Candle. In this chapter I argue that the poet's symbolism also intimates an even more important image of Christianity and of Easter: the Cross of Christ.¹ For not only are swords cross-shaped, but plenty of evidence survives from Anglo-Saxon England and early medieval Scandinavia to indicate a close connection between swords, their hilts and the Cross.² There is even a possibility that candle and Cross were combined at Easter in Anglo-Saxon England, as in later centuries at least the Paschal Candle was decorated with a prominent representation of the Cross, as it is in the Roman Catholic church to this day. Again, though, I stress that if the image of the Cross is relevant to the giant sword, this relevance is implicit in the poem's ambiguous symbolism, not openly stated.

Support for this proposal comes from both inside and outside *Beowulf*. I first examine corroborative evidence external to *Beowulf*, before returning to the words of the poem.

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- 1 I am not aware that a link between the giant sword and the Cross has been proposed before, although the scholarly literature on *Beowulf* is so extensive that I cannot be sure.
 - 2 Cf. also an episode from the Armenian epic *Sasna Crér* analogous to *Beowulf*'s adventure in the mere. It records that the hero Sanasar descended into Blue Lake (Lake Van). There, finding himself on dry land, he obtained a lightning-sword, a marvellous horse (not paralleled in *Beowulf*) and, following a dream-vision of the Mother of God, a chapel's 'Battle Cross'. Angels placed this cross on his right arm—in other words, on his sword-arm and therefore above the hilt of his radiant sword. See A. K. Shalian, *David of Sassoun: The Armenian Folk Epic in Four Cycles* (Athens, Ohio, 1964), 44–8; Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 131. This Cross was radiant and also known as the 'Victory Cross'; L. Surmelian, *Daredevils of Sassoun: The Armenian National Epic* (Denver, 1964), 75 n. 3, 184.

The Cross in the Lake

Three Old English prose texts precede *Beowulf* in the Nowell Codex of Cotton Vitellius A.xv: *The Passion of Saint Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. They were written down by the same scribe who recorded the first 1,939 lines of *Beowulf*. Coincidentally or not, the second of these texts effectively primes its audience for the presence of a red cross in Grendel's mere, thereby reinforcing the *Beowulf*-poet's subtle evocation of the Harrowing of Hell.³ It does so through verbal and pictorial description of the Lake of the Moon.⁴

Thus, *Wonders* describes an unnamed Eastern land, populated by *ða wyrstan men* 'the worst men'.⁵ In this land:

þar syndon twegen seaþas; oþer is sunnan oþer monan. Se sunnan seað, se bið dægæs hat ond nihtes ceald, ond se monan seað, se bið nihtes hat ond dægæs ceald. Heora widnes is .cc. þæs læssan mil-geteles *stadia*, ond þæs maran þe *leones* hatte .cxxxiii. ond an healf mil.⁶

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- 3 Additionally, it may be noted that *The Passion of Saint Christopher* describes how a heathen king prepared to subject the saint to torture on an iron bench above a fierce fire, only to find that, at Christopher's words, the bench became *eallswa gepywed weax* 'just like pressed wax'. The king promptly collapsed *oð ða nigofan tide* 'until the ninth hour' and declared that he would kill Christopher the following day at the same hour; see R. D. Fulk (ed. and trans.), *The Beowulf Manuscript: Complete Texts and The Fight at Finnsburg* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), 2, 4.
- 4 In addition to the Anglo-Saxon lunar knowledge and traditions mentioned in the following pages, there is an extensive body of pre-Conquest prognostic and computational lore concerning the moon, which, however, does not seem relevant to *Beowulf*; see L. S. Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100: Study and Texts* (Leiden, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158290.i-608>; R. M. Liuzza (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics: An Edition and Translation of Texts from London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A.III* (Cambridge, 2011); P. S. Baker and M. Lapidge (ed.), *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, EETS s.s. 15 (Oxford, 1995). Anglo-Saxons' interest in the moon and the sun is also apparent from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; see O. Brazell, 'Astronomical Observations in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Journal of the British Astronomical Association* 101 (1991), 117–8; on one particular eclipse mentioned therein, see A. P. Smyth, 'The Solar Eclipse of Wednesday 29 October AD 878: Ninth-Century Historical Records and the Findings of Modern Astronomy', in J. Roberts, J. L. Nelson and M. Godden (ed.), *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honour of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1997), 187–210.
- 5 Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, 24.
- 6 Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, 24. See also Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 194; A. E. Knock, 'Wonders of the East: A Synoptic Edition of the Letter of Pharasmanes and the Old English and Old Picard Translations' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1981), 482–4, <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/2927963/336701.pdf>

there are two lakes;⁷ one is of the sun, the other of the moon. The Lake of the Sun, it is hot by day and cold by night, and the Lake of the Moon, it is hot by night and cold by day. Their width is two hundred of the lesser mile-measures called *stadia*, and of the greater, which are called *leones*, one hundred and thirty three and one half mile.

This passage is a close translation of the continental Latin original, which reads:

Sunt et alibi laci duo, unus solis et alius lunae: qui solis est die calidus nocte frigidus, qui lunae est nocte calidus die frigidus. Longitudo eorum .CC. stadia sunt, quae faciunt leuuas .CXXXIII. et dimidium miliarium.⁸

The source of this Latin passage is obscure. Although Anne Knock adduces an analogue in the *De mirabilibus mundi* 'On the marvels of the world' (chapter 29) by the third-century writer Solinus, which mentions an African spring boiling hot by day and icy cold by night, it is not associated with the sun.⁹ Knock remarks on the lakes in *Wonders* that:

The attribution of these lakes to the sun and moon respectively raises two possibilities. We may be dealing with an ancient, possibly pre-Greek myth ...; the other possibility is that the single lake, as described by Solinus, has become confused in some way with the sun and moon trees consulted by Alexander as an oracle.¹⁰

At the risk of emulating certain 'Wiltshire rustics [who], as the story goes, seeing the figure of the moon in a pond, attempted to rake it out',¹¹ I observe that the Lake of the Moon bears marked similarities to Grendel's mere, in that:

(a) Like its counterpart, the Lake of the Sun, it is situated in the land of 'the worst men'. *Beowulf*'s mere was rather similarly

7 OE *seað* normally means 'pit'; see Knock, 'Wonders', 92.

8 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 178.

9 Knock, 'Wonders', 791; J. White (ed.), 'Caii Julii Solini De Mirabilibus Mundi, Capitula xxiii—xxxiv', in *The Latin Library*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/solinus3a.html>

10 Knock, 'Wonders', 791.

11 *OED* s.v. 'moonraker'—a jocular explanation from 1787 of why natives of Wiltshire were called 'moonrakers'; *EDD*, s.v. 'moon' (13). See further J. Cashford, *The Moon: Myth and Image* (London, 2003), 83–7 on the theme of the 'moon in the water', as manifest in, for example, the Lincolnshire folk-tale *The Dead Moon* which I discuss in Chapter 14.

situated amid a *dygel lond* ‘secret land’ (1357) inhabited by Grendel and his mother, who, although giants, are also described in human terms. Grendel is described early in the poem as a *wonsæli wer* ‘unfortunate man’ (105), and later as a *guma* ‘man’ (973, 1682).

He and his gender-ambiguous mother would broadly qualify for classification as ‘the worst men’.

- (b) Whereas the Lake of the Sun is hot by day and cold by night, the Lake of the Moon is hot by night and cold by day. So, too, it appears, was Grendel’s mere. Before Beowulf descends into its waters to fight Grendel’s mother, Hroðgar describes the scene, including the marvel that *Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon, fyr on flode* ‘There, each night, one can see a hostile/waning/dark-moon(?)¹² wonder, fire on [or ‘in’] the flood’ (1365–6). If fire was visible on, or in, the mere by night, we may infer that it was hot by night. We may also infer that its fire, and therefore heat, was absent by day, which would explain the frosted trees overhanging it and tie in with the analogy of the thaw when the giant sword melts.
- (c) The mere’s chief inhabitants may very well have a lunar aspect. We have already adduced one parallel between Grendel’s mother and a Norse giantess called *Mána* ‘Moon’. I adduce further indications of a lunar side to *Beowulf*’s *ellorgæstas* ‘alien visitors/spirits’ (1349) in Chapter 14.¹³ This will include evidence indicating that the author of the Old English *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*—whose conclusion focuses on the Trees of the Sun and Moon—saw reason to describe a monster with a moon-like head in terms suggestive of Grendel.

Given these parallels, it may be significant that, in Cotton Vitellius A.xv, both the Lake of the Moon and the Lake of the Sun are illustrated in *Wonders* by concentric circles surrounding a cross. Both crosses have a large central red circle, and each of their horizontal and vertical arms ends in a red semicircle. The Lake of the Moon’s cross is less red than

12 See my discussion of OE *nið(-)* in Chapter 14.

13 Similarly, Grendel is an *ellorgast* (807) and the blood which melts the giant sword’s blade comes from an *ellorgæst* (1617; also *ellorgast* 1621).

the Lake of the Sun's, doubtless to indicate the moon's lesser brightness and heat. Additionally, the outer circle of the Lake of the Moon is white, presumably to indicate ice,¹⁴ whereas the Lake of the Sun's is greyish-blue, presumably to denote flowing water.¹⁵

The crosses within both lakes resemble jewelled Anglo-Saxon Christian crosses, such as the seventh-century example found on a Nottinghamshire farm in August 2008.¹⁶ They also recall the ancient image of the 'wheel-cross'—a cross within a circle/wheel—which was established as a sun-symbol in northern Europe in the Early Bronze Age.¹⁷ In Anglo-Saxon England the image of the solar cross also found expression in *sio reade rod* 'the red Rood' that will shine over all *on þære sunnan gyld* 'in place of the sun' on Doomsday, according to the Old English poem *Christ* (1101–2);¹⁸ in the image of the *Crux invicta* 'unconquered Cross' used in hymns; and in the cross-shaped nimbus of Christ in late pre-Conquest iconography.¹⁹

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- 14 Cf. King Alfred's reference to *snaw-cealdes weg, / monan gemæro* 'the snow-cold one's way, the moon's boundary'; Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, 364–5 (*Metre* 29, lines 8–9).
- 15 See the colour facsimile in A. S. Mittman and S. M. Kim, *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the Beowulf Manuscript* (Tempe, 2013), MK 6r; also folio 103r, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f094r. For a different depiction of these lakes, without the crosses, in a late Anglo-Saxon scientific miscellany, London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B V/1, fol. 83r, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v!1_f002r.
- 16 See 'Amateur Treasure Hunter Finds £25,000 Jewelled Cross in Field with Metal Detector' (6 August 2008), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1042082/Amateur-treasure-hunter-finds-25-000-jewelled-cross-field-metal-detector.html>
- 17 See e.g., A. Andrén, *Tracing Old Norse Cosmology: The World Tree, Middle Earth, and the Sun in Archaeological Perspectives* (Lund, 2014), 135; M. Cahill, "'Here Comes The Sun...'", *Archaeology Ireland* 29 (Spring 2015), 26–33; D. Panchenko, 'Scandinavian Background of Greek Mythic Cosmography: The Sun's Water Transport', *Hyperboreus: Studia Classica* 18 (2012), 5–20, figs. 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13; A. Lahelma, 'The Circumpolar Context of the "Sun Ship" Motif in South Scandinavian Rock Art', in P. Skoglund, J. Ling and U. Bertilsson (ed.), *North Meets South: Theoretical Aspects on the Northern and Southern Rock Art Traditions in Scandinavia* (Oxford, 2017), 144–71 at 163–4.
- 18 B. J. Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2 vols (Exeter, 1994), I, 90.
- 19 J. Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* (Frankfurt, 1979), 139–41. See also the Anglo-Norse Gosforth Cross (discussed in Chapter 10) and the impressive heads of certain Celtic stone crosses, such as Muiredach's Cross in Monasterboice, County Louth, Ireland, which dates from the ninth or tenth century. Of interest, too, is an instance of a 'pyramid' (a form of sword-harness or scabbard decoration), possibly from Anglo-Saxon Norfolk, which bears a four-armed cross between the arms of which appear two (divine?)

In common with many other parallels adduced in this study, the precise relationship between *Wonders' Lake of the Moon*, its manuscript illustration and *Beowulf* is obscure. I suspect, though, that the presence of such distinctive similarities in the same manuscript is not inconsequential.

Three Old English Heavenly Candle-Crosses

Other Old English poems attest to the close association of candle and Cross. If, as I have argued, the giant sword suggests a candle, this finding offers some support for the idea that it may also intimate the Cross. In fact, the two symbols appear mutually reinforcing.

Thus the Biblical poem *Exodus* describes the Pillar of Fire as a *heofoncandel* 'heaven-candle' (115) which dispels the shadows of night. In so doing, he implicitly identifies it with the Paschal Candle and the Cross.²⁰

Another religious poem, *Guthlac B*, describes a miraculous luminescence, which replaced the sun's light in order to dispel the shadows of night, as a *heofonlic condel* 'heavenly candle'.²¹ It has been identified as 'the sign of the Cross shining brightly in the night sky'.²²

A union of Paschal Candle and Cross may also lie at the heart of *Riddle 30b* of the tenth-century *Exeter Book*. This poem reads:

Ic eom ligbysig lace mid winde,
wuldre bewunden wedre gesomnad,
fus forðweges, fyre gemylted;

faces—one smiling, one frowning—and two designs which might each represent a solar eye; see *SASE5-7*, 275-7, 282-3.

20 See P. J. Lucas, 'Old English Christian Poetry: The Cross in *Exodus*', in G. Bonner (ed.), *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede* (London, 1976), 193-209 at 203-4; P. J. Lucas (ed.), *Exodus*, rev. edn. (Exeter, 1994), 94; cf. P. Portnoy, *The Remnant: Essays on a Theme in Old English Verse* (London, 2005), 199. A direct equation between the Paschal Candle and the Pillar of Fire appears in *Mirk's Festial*, a work composed in the 1380s which 'can be relied upon to give us the commonplaces for the Christian year' (E. G. Stanley, 'Light for Oxford', in K. P. Clarke and S. Baccianti (ed.), *On Light* (Oxford, 2013), 5-24 at 9): *pys paschall bytokeneþe þe pyler of fure* 'this Paschal (candle) betokens the Pillar of Fire'; T. Erbe (ed.), *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies, by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk)*, Part I, EETS e.s. 96 (London, 1905), 127.

21 Roberts, *Guthlac Poems*, 121, line 1290.

22 Lucas, *Exodus*, 94 n. to line 115.

bearu blowende, byrnende gled.
 Ful oft mec gesiþas sendað æfter hondum,
 þær mec weras ond wif wlonce gecyssað.
 Þonne ic mec onhæbbe, hi onhnigað to me,
 modge miltsum, swa ic mongum sceal
 ycan upcyme eadignesse.²³

I am fire-busy/troubled, I contend/play with the wind, wound-about with brilliance, with weather united, eager for the way forth, by fire melted; a blooming grove, a burning ember. Very often companions pass me from hand to hand; there proud men and women kiss me. When I raise myself up, they bow down to me, spirited ones with humility, since I must, for many, augment the resurrection of blessedness.

Various solutions to this riddle have been proposed, the most widely accepted being OE *beam* in various senses, notably 'tree', 'log', 'ship' and 'cross'.²⁴ However, since none of these things characteristically melt, it is hard to reconcile them with the verb *gemylted* 'melted', which, following precedent,²⁵ I favour as the *lectio difficilior* over the alternative *gebysgad* 'troubled' of the variant *Riddle 30a*—a riddle answered as '*Crux invicta*', the Sun-Cross, by one scholar,²⁶ and as 'the Cross' by another.²⁷

Briefly, my proposed answer to *Riddle 30b* is similarly 'the Cross'. I tentatively suggest that the Cross is imagined first as represented on the Paschal Candle.²⁸ Secondly, the Cross appears separately in the hands of worshippers who kissed it on Good Friday. Thirdly, it appears raised from a horizontal position of seclusion and stands openly on high in a symbolic re-enactment of Christ's Resurrection.

More specifically, I suggest, *Riddle 30b* begins with the image of a burning, melting Paschal Candle flickering in the wind, decorated with images of (or surrounded by) flowers,²⁹ and laden with an ember of incense. This image combines with that of the radiant, blooming Tree

23 Adapted from Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, I, 355.

24 C. Williamson (ed.), *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill, 1977), 231.

25 See R. M. Liuzza, 'The Texts of the Old English Riddle 30', *JEGP* 87 (1988), 1–15 at 6.

26 Ritzke-Rutherford, *Light and Darkness*, 219–25.

27 A. Talentino, 'Riddle 30: The Vehicle of the Cross', *Neophilologus* 65 (1981), 129–36.

28 There is no evidence from Anglo-Saxon England for the decoration of the Paschal Candle with an image of the Cross, but this practice was customary in later centuries, as it is to this day. Girard, *Textual History*, thinks the practice a later innovation.

29 Cf. Freeman, 'Lighting', 197, 199; MacGregor, *Fire and Light*, 379–81.

of the Cross—also seen in the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* and the associated Ruthwell Cross³⁰—a tree perhaps assailed by the fire of a windy lightning-storm. The burning cross-candle is, at any rate, somehow *wedre gesomnad* ‘united with the weather’, a notion that may call to mind *Beowulf*’s linking of the melting candle-sword (if this concept is accepted) to the vernal thaw; the traditional use of the Paschal Candle to prevent bad weather may also be recalled.

The riddle’s second half may allude to the ritual in which members of a Roman Catholic congregation successively kiss the Cross on Good Friday.³¹ It may also refer to the Cross’s subsequent elevation from a concealed horizontal position,³² in a symbolic re-enactment of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, an event also symbolized by the Paschal Candle.

That this is a tenable interpretation of *Riddle 30b* is suggested by the Easter liturgical theme of the preceding seven poems of the *Exeter Book*, as detected by its most recent editor.³³ These poems include *The Descent into Hell*, an account of the Harrowing of Hell in which references to the unbinding of Hell’s captives merit comparison with the unbinding of the world’s waters in *Beowulf*. They also include *Pharoah*, a fragmentary poem about God’s destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. *Riddle 30b* appears not just to continue this Easter theme in the *Exeter Book*, but to mark its climax.³⁴

Sword-Hilts, Sword-Blades and Crosses

If *Riddle 30b* blends Paschal Candle with Cross, this blending may find parallel in *Beowulf*. The giant sword—a cross-shaped weapon which Beowulf found hanging on the wall of the giants’ lair (like a crucifix?)³⁵—

30 Swanton, *Dream of the Rood*; B. Cassidy (ed.), *The Ruthwell Cross: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 8 December 1989* (Princeton, 1992).

31 Cf. Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 44 (§45); J. Hill, ‘The Liturgy and the Laity’, in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: The World Through Their Eyes* (Oxford, 2014), 61–7 at 64–5.

32 Cf. Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 44 (§46), 49 (§50).

33 Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, I, 26.

34 For another attempt to relate this riddle to the liturgy of Easter, see J. E. Anderson, *Two Literary Riddles in the Exeter Book: Riddle 1 and the Easter Riddle with Full Translations* (Norman, 1986), 138–44.

35 Cf. the hanging above a Christian altar of the gold-adorned sword *Hneitir* ‘Cutter’ in Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla, ÍF 26–8*, 3 vols

may, I have proposed, be implicitly likened to a burning candle, perhaps especially the Paschal Candle. Furthermore, after the sword's blade had melted, Beowulf was left holding just its hilt with (I presume) its crossguard. I suggest this development is interpretable on one level as a revelation of the weapon's spiritual significance for Christians, its physically martial aspect being dispensed with after the blade has done its job of beheading the two devilish giants; in other words, the sword is not so much destroyed as transmuted to—from a Christian perspective—a higher level of religious significance. For especially if *Beowulf* were composed in the seventh or eighth century, the sword's handle would resemble a tau-Cross, a type known from ecclesiastical contexts in Anglo-Saxon England.³⁶ Such an image would also accord with the broad theme of 'the remnant' as a signifier of salvation, which was familiar to Anglo-Saxons from its prominence in the Easter Vigil.³⁷

Archaeology supplies clearer evidence of a close connection between sword and cross (not always Christian) in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Scandinavia. It comes in the form of swords with cross-decoration on their hilts.³⁸ Before identifying examples of these, though, I should mention a recently excavated aristocratic or

(Reykjavík, 1979), III, 369–70; M. Clunies Ross (ed.), *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, SPSMA 7 (Turnhout, 2007), 48.

- 36 See e.g., J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner and L. Webster (ed.), *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art* (London, 1984), 119–20, nos. 120 and 121. Swords with straight guards are characteristic of the fifth to eighth centuries; curved guards are thought to be a later English development that spread to Scandinavia; see P. Bone, 'The Development of Anglo-Saxon Swords from the Fifth to the Eleventh Century', in S. Chadwick Hawkes (ed.), *Weapons and Warfare in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), 63–70 at 66. Additionally, the pommel of an upright hilt might suggest a suppedaneum. Cf. Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 151.
- 37 See Portnoy, *Remnant*, 123. Portnoy, however, takes an entirely different view of the significance of the melting sword and its hilt by arguing that they emphasize 'decimation and destruction' (125), not the promise of resurrection: 'the "remnant" in *Beowulf* describes a downward trajectory of doom and annihilation in comparison to the Book of Enoch, where the "remnant" is an uplifting signifier of promise and eternal life' (92).
- 38 See also *SASE5-7*, 262 for a photograph of a reproduction of a sword from Niederstotzingen, Germany, which has a cross-design at the centre of its pommel. On the association of swords and crosses in Anglo-Saxon England, see also M. D. Cherniss, 'The Cross as Christ's Weapon: The Influence of Heroic Literary Tradition on *The Dream of the Rood*', *ASE* 2 (1973), 241–52, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0263675100000454>. Generally on the Cross as a weapon in pre-Conquest England, see D. F. Johnson, 'The *Crux Usualis* as Apotropaic Weapon in Anglo-Saxon England', in C. E. Karkov, S. L. Keefer and K. L. Jolly (ed.), *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2006), 80–95.

royal burial mound at Prittlewell, Essex, which probably dates from the late sixth century.³⁹

The Prittlewell grave-mound contained the coffined body of a man upon whose eyes, it appears, two small gold-foil crosses had been placed and then probably covered by a piece of cloth made of gold braid. Outside the coffin, and markedly separate from the man's body, but on a level with his westward-facing head, there lay on the floor of the burial chamber, at roughly right angles to the coffin, a large sword in an ash-wood, wool-lined scabbard. This sword had a pattern-welded blade and a hilt made from animal horn ornamented with gold. I suggest that this extremely unusual placement implies a distanced association—or a partial dissociation—between the golden and obviously Christian crosses on the man's eyes and the cross-shaped sword, especially its gold-adorned hilt, which is nearer than its blade to the coffin and therefore to the crosses.⁴⁰ If this arrangement symbolizes the subordination by an early Christian convert, or at least his buriers, of the sword to the Cross, it would be in keeping with (as I see it) the fundamental meaning of the symbolism of the melting giant sword in *Beowulf*, which I propose in Chapter 16.

Probably somewhat later, from the seventh century, is the famous ship-burial in Mound One at Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, which provides my first example of a sword-hilt bearing a cross or crosses. Among this burial's many riches is a sword with a gold-plated hilt which has quatrefoil/cross-shaped garnets on its pommel; there are also scabbard-bosses bearing cross-decoration.⁴¹ Potential connections between this burial and the world described in *Beowulf* have long been discussed.⁴²

39 See S. Hirst and C. Scull, *The Anglo-Saxon Princely Burial at Prittlewell, Southend-on-Sea* ([n.p.] Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), 2019); MOLA, 'Prittlewell Princely Burial' (2019), <https://prittlewellprincelyburial.org/museum/>; L. Webster, 'The Prittlewell (Essex) Burial: A Comparison with Other Anglo-Saxon Princely Graves', in T. A. S. M., Panhuysen (ed.), *Transformations in North-Western Europe (AD 300–1000): Proceedings of the 60th Sachsensymposium 19.-23. September 2009 Maastricht* (Hannover, 2011), 266–72.

40 Cf. remarks in Hirst and Scull, *Anglo-Saxon Princely Burial*, 94 on the potential significance of this sword's exceptional positioning in comparison with other graves in which, when a sword is present, it is almost always placed beside or on the body, or even hugged by it.

41 R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial*, 3 vols (London, 1975–83), II, 290, 292, 295, 303. On scabbard-crosses, see also SASE, 92–3, 113; SASE5–7, 192.

42 See e.g., R. Frank, 'Beowulf and Sutton Hoo: The Odd Couple', in C. E. Karkov (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings* (New York, 1999), 317–38 and references therein; also now Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*.

The burial's grave goods suggest a culture in which Germanic paganism and Christianity were in contact.

The seventh-century Staffordshire hoard from Mercia supplies a wealth of evidence for a close sword-cross connection among its many pommels and other sword-fittings. Most strikingly, one side of the gilded pommel of a ring-sword (like the giant sword) is decorated with a large cross (probably the Cross) that features a red centre and arms in a blue setting—a likely sun-Cross.⁴³

Another much later English instance of a sword decorated with a cross is a late ninth- or early tenth-century weapon recovered from a stream in Gilling West, North Yorkshire (see Figure 1). Its pommel bears, between two bars of roughly vertical ornamentation, the image of an enclosed and encircled cross—a sun-cross. It is shown either set on a plinth or, rather,

43 See 'Staffordshire Hoard Reveals Yet Another Helmet and Rare Pommel' (28 May 2015), <https://www.medieval.eu/staffordshire-hoard-reveals-yet-another-helmet-and-rare-pommel>, which observes: 'Its [i.e., the pommel's] central garnet and glass inlaid disc can be seen to form an early Christian cross and on the other side is a motif formed of three serpents. So both Christian and pagan beliefs may be represented'; also C. Fern, A. Osinska, L. Martin and G. Evans, 'The Catalogue Part 1: Pommels and Sword-Rings', *Staffordshire Hoard Catalogue* (2017), no. 76 [K98 *et al.*], https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2457-1/dissemination/pdf/10_Catalogue/Cat_1_Pommels_web.pdf. For other instances of (often golden) pommels from this hoard that bear crosses of various types, see *ibid.*, nos. 37 [K1228], 39 [K349], 41 [K465], 49 [K674], 52 [K284, K327], 53 [K145, K808, K1167] (swastika), 54 [K355], 57 [K27, K358] (boar heads terminate the arms of a cross), 63 [K306, K1826], 71 [K514, K1684, K1901], 74 [K5, K596, K597, K604, K1374, K1968] (swastika). Also on pommels from this hoard, see S. Fischer and J. Soulat, 'The Typochronology of Sword Pommels from the Staffordshire Hoard', in *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, <https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/svantefischerandjeansoulat>, and note the design on the sixth- or seventh-century pommel from Hög Edsten, Sweden, illustrated therein. At least two hilt-collars from the Staffordshire hoard display crosses; see C. Fern, A. Osinska, L. Martin and G. Evans, 'The Catalogue Part 2: Hilt-Collars', *Staffordshire Hoard Catalogue* (2017), nos. 166 [K660], 178 [K380], https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2457-1/dissemination/pdf/10_Catalogue/Cat_2_collars_web.pdf. Fragments of hilt-plate from the hoard bear crosses; see C. Fern, A. Osinska, L. Martin and G. Evans, 'The Catalogue Part 4: Hilt-Plates and Hilt-Guards', *Staffordshire Hoard Catalogue* (2017), no. 360 [K320, K1063, K1250], https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2457-1/dissemination/pdf/10_Catalogue/Cat_4_hilt_plates_and_guards_web.pdf. Additionally, pyramids and buttons from the hoard display crosses; see C. Fern, A. Osinska and L. Martin, 'The Catalogue Part 7: Pyramid and Button Fittings, and Personal Items', *Staffordshire Hoard Catalogue* (2017), nos. 574 [K107], 575 [K1201], 576 [K450], 577 [K565], 578 [K451], 579 [K1166], 580 [K302], 581 [K382, K676, K849, K999, K1254], 582 [K675], 583 [K1425], https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2457-1/dissemination/pdf/10_Catalogue/Cat_7_pyramidandbuttonfittings_web.pdf.

I think, radiating light down toward the blade.⁴⁴ Similar, and clearly related, is the imagery on some other Anglo-Saxon pommels of similar date. One from Grønneberg, Norway, which was most likely made in England, bears a cross with four bifurcated arms within a circle.⁴⁵ Another sword from Heggestrøa, Steinkjer, Norway bears an Anglo-Saxon pommel adorned with similar decoration, including a circle divided into eight equal sections—potentially a radiant solar cross.⁴⁶ Also noteworthy in this regard are a comparable pommel from Dolven, Norway, which seems to have lost its sun-cross design,⁴⁷ and the pommel of a sword from Fiskerton, Lincolnshire, England, although again its sun-cross is missing.⁴⁸ I return to the imagery on these hilts in Chapter 16 in relation to a most important pommel from Bedale, North Yorkshire.



Figure 1. Pommel of the Gilling West Sword.

© York Museums Trust, <https://yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

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- 44 See J. R. Watkin, 'A Late Anglo-Saxon Sword from Gilling West, N. Yorkshire', *Medieval Archaeology* 30 (1986), 93–9.
- 45 SASE, 70 and fig. 41b.
- 46 A. M. Heen-Pettersen, 'Insular Artefacts from Viking-Age Burials from mid-Norway. A Review of Contact between Trøndelag and Britain and Ireland', *Internet Archaeology* 38 (2015), §3.6 and fig. 22, <https://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue38/2/toc.html>
- 47 SASE, 70 and fig. 41a.
- 48 A. White, *Lincoln Museums Information Sheet, Archaeology Series 13, Antiquities from the River Witham, Part 2: Anglo-Saxon and Viking* (Lincoln, 1979), 4–5, https://www.thecollectionmuseum.com/assets/downloads/IS_arch_13_antiquities_from_the_witham_anglo_saxon_and_viking.pdf; 'Fiskerton Sword', http://www.vikingage.org/wiki/index.php?title=File:Sword_fiskerton.jpg

From Scandinavia we also have an early ninth-century sword recovered from a bog in Bjørnsholm, north Jylland, Denmark. Its hilt is covered in ornamental crosses.⁴⁹ Additionally, there is the crossguard of a Viking Age sword from Hedeby, which bears images of two crosses, along with images of a snake and a bird.⁵⁰ More remarkable, though, is a sword discovered in a grave in Norway in 2011.

This late Viking Age weapon, found at Langeid in the south of the country, bears what are surely Christian crosses, various other symbols and mainly Latin letters in gold inlay on its hilt (see Figure 2). As it was found alongside a penny of Æthelred II (978–1016), there are grounds for thinking that one of King Canute's warriors brought it to Norway from England, where it may have been made. It will reward examination in some detail, even if a full understanding eludes me.⁵¹

On one side, the top of the pommel shows a hand holding a Cross, next to which is a sign interpretable as the letter *S*, a combination that has been tentatively interpreted as representing *X(ristos) S(alvator)* 'Christ the Saviour'. Alternatively, or additionally, the *S* could be a rotated Anglo-Saxon *Sigel*-rune (𐌺) representing the sun.

Immediately below the Cross and the *S* is a stylized face. Its most obvious features are two swirling designs apparently representing extremely large eyes, which are possibly intended to appear fiery or mesmeric. Between them at the bottom is an angular design presumably representing a nose, perhaps below a furrowed brow at the top. The nose surmounts an ungilded arc that curves upward at either end; it may suggest both a moustache and an upper jaw.⁵² Beneath this arc is what looks like an open mouth of a curious angular design; it might be described as a fusion of two Anglo-Saxon *Ing*-runes (ᚷ), one upright, one horizontal—I think it not wholly inconceivable that the design here alludes to, and subsumes, the identity of *Ing*. The mouth is flanked by two downward-facing letter *Es*, which possibly double as rudimentary representations of a beard and as abbreviations for *Emmanuel* (from the Hebrew for 'God is with us') or *Ecclesiae* 'to/from/of the Church'. In

49 K. Randsborg, *The Viking Age in Denmark: The Formation of a State* (New York, 1980), 113.

50 J. Graham-Campbell and D. Kidd, *The Vikings* (London, 1980), 146–7.

51 For an illustrated description of this sword, see V. Vike, 'The Ornate Sword from Langeid' (21 September 2017), <http://www.khm.uio.no/english/research/collections/objects/02/langeid-sword.html>

52 Cf., perhaps, the arc on the Bedale sword-pommel and its relatives, which, in Chapter 16, I suggest represents a solar barque.

turn, these are flanked by crosses which may double as ears. Below is another ungilded arc, although this one extends upwards and around the face, apparently forming both the lower jaw and the cranium. Its wide separation from the upper arc may strengthen the impression that the face's mouth is open.

Below the pommel and the grip, on the downward-angled crossguard, the mouth-design is repeated but with the addition of a vertical line in the centre, which makes it somewhat resemble an eye (albeit of very different type from those swirling above). However, this would be a rather surprising identification, and therefore the design may instead represent a pendant worn by the male whose head is the pommel and whose neck is the grip. Alternatively, it may represent his navel. Multiple significances need not be unintentional.

The 'pendant' is flanked on either side by three letters, followed by a snail-like swirl similar to those forming the eyes on the pommel. Each swirl has two small horns and ends in two terminations suggestive of legs and feet. These encourage interpretation of the crossguard's twin branches as the man's arms and legs. In that case, the weapon's blade could represent a huge phallus, a sword being a potentially phallic symbol.

The letters to the right of the 'pendant' are possibly *DNE*, with the *N* inverted and two small horns on the *D* (also present on the crossguard's swirls) perhaps indicating a contraction. These letters could be the standard abbreviation for Latin *d(omi)ne* '(O) Lord'. But perhaps more likely they stand for the battle-cry *D(eus) n(obiscum) e(st)* 'God is with us' or for *D(eus) n(obiscum), E(mmanuel)* 'God is with us, Emmanuel'. Then again, if the *N* is rather an *S*, or doubles as one, we may have *D(eu) s e(st)* 'It is God' or *D(eu)s, E(mmanuel)*. Alternatively, if the *N* is rather a *Sigel*-rune, or doubles as one, we may have *D(eus) s(igel) e(st)* 'God is the Sun'. Again, multiple meanings may be intended.

The sequence of letters to the left is a reverse symmetrical *D+E*, with the *D* again 'horned'. The difference might be explained by the similarity of the Cross to the Anglo-Saxon *Nyd*-rune (†).⁵³ If so, we have the equivalent of *DNE*.

The hilt's other side has a similar overall design, but with some clear differences. In place of the hand-held Cross at the top of the pommel, the

53 Cf. K. Meling, 'The Cross as a Principle in the Formation of Certain Old English Runes', *NM* 80 (1979), 36–8 at 37.

face has what may be a golden crown. The face's nose is now a cross (or a nose-guard?), the direction of the eye-swirls is reversed, and the four X-like corners of the mouth have been filled in, giving a fuller impression no longer suggestive of the fusion of two *Ing*-runes. The same is the case with the 'pendant' on the crossguard, which, in addition, now contains a cross. The flanking letters on either side show some differences, too. On the right we have again have *DNE* or *DSE*, but with the 'horned' *D* reversed. To the left, more puzzlingly, we have *NHE* or *SHE*.

Whatever the meaning of the letters on the hilt,⁵⁴ two further points may be made. First, the anthropoid design of the sword's ornamentation confers on the weapon the identity of a man or god⁵⁵—recall the ambiguity of *secg* 'man'/'sword' with regard to the giant sword in *Beowulf* (1569). Second, the hand-held Cross depicted on the pommel is implicitly identifiable with the hand-held sword on which it is inscribed. If so, the sword is conceived of as a divine weapon, being both the sword of Christ (and *Ing*?) and in some sense Christ (and *Ing*?) himself.⁵⁶ Since it also seems possible to interpret the design as showing a sword emerging from the face's open mouth, especially relevant may be the reference in *Revelation* 1:13–6 to the Christ-like figure resembling the Son of Man, who has eyes like fire, a sharp, two-edged sword emerging from his mouth and a face that shines like the sun; also, in *Revelation* 19:11–6, to the righteous crowned Word of God. In any case, if, as seems clear, the Langedid sword, and especially its golden hilt, is closely linked with the Cross as the figurative sword of Christ and possibly with the sun, it merits comparison—despite the chronological gap—with *Beowulf's* giant sword, which, in my view, is implicitly likened to a Cross-like, solar candle of divine justice.

54 The sword's blade also bears inscriptions, which have yet to be interpreted.

55 Cf. Pearce, 'Spirit of the Sword'. For earlier 'Celtic' short swords with X-shaped anthropoid hilts, see R. Pleiner, *The Celtic Sword* (Oxford, 1993) and A. P. Fitzpatrick, 'Night and Day: The Symbolism of Astral Signs on Later Iron Age Anthropomorphic Short Swords', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 62 (1996), 373–98. Fitzpatrick observes that some of these swords' blades bear designs interpretable as lunar symbols.

56 A silver pommel with gilding from the Staffordshire hoard (K711) shows on one side a male face with staring eyes and ears into which, it seems, two creatures (birds?) are speaking. The face might be that of the Anglo-Saxon god Woden, but the other side of the pommel depicts two boars' heads, which might also, or alternatively, link the sword with *Ing*, see Æ. Thompson, 'Sth711: Woden's Pommelcap' (17 May 2012), <http://thethegns.blogspot.com/2012/05/sth-711.html>; Fern *et al.*, *Catalogue Part 1*, no. 68 [K711].



Figure 2. The Langeid Sword.

© Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway, CC BY-SA 4.

Other Viking Age swords bear inscribed crosses on their blades and occasionally the Christian inscription *In nomine domini* 'In the name of the Lord'.⁵⁷ One tenth- or eleventh-century instance taken from the Thames, England has a cross flanked by triple bars on one side and the inscription *Ingelrii* on the other.⁵⁸ Some other swords have a plain cross preceding the same name.⁵⁹

Although it has not survived, a sword more intimately connected with the Cross (but again postdating *Beowulf*) was reportedly that of the Emperor Constantine the Great, which the Anglo-Saxon King Æthelstan received as a gift from Hugh, king of the Franks, in 926. William of Malmesbury's description, apparently based on a tenth-century Latin work (at least partly poetic),⁶⁰ reads:

ensem Constantini Magni, in quo litteris aureis nomen antiqui possessoris
legebatur, in capulo quoque super crassas auri laminas clauum ferreum

57 I. G. Peirce, *Swords of the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2002), 9, 110.

58 J. Lang and B. Ager, 'Swords of the Anglo-Saxon and Viking Periods in the British Museum: A Radiographic Study', in Chadwick Hawkes, *Weapons and Warfare*, 85–122 at 104 (no. 5). Analogous are Viking Age Swedish axeheads that are open in the middle except for a (doubtless Christian) cross; see N. Price, 'Belief & Ritual', in G. Williams, P. Pentz and M. Wemhoff (ed.), *Vikings: Life and Legend* (London, 2014), 162–201 at 185.

59 Peirce, *Swords*, 9.

60 S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), 253.

affixum cerneres, unum ex quattuor quos Iudaica factio Dominici corporis aptarat suplitio.⁶¹

the sword of Constantine the Great, on which the name of its ancient owner could be read in gold letters; also on the hilt,⁶² on thick plates of gold, you could see fixed an iron nail, one of four which the Jewish faction had prepared for the tormenting of the Lord's body.⁶³

One could scarcely ask for a closer identification of an inscribed gold-plated sword-hilt with the Cross.⁶⁴

Implicit equations, or close associations, of sword/hilt and Cross are made elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon literature and visual art, as further examples will show.

A complex Old English cure for *ælfadl* 'elf-sickness', in which signs of the Cross feature prominently, climaxes with the instruction to *writ mid sweorde* 'inscribe with a sword' four such signs around the medicine.⁶⁵

When the Old English prose *Life of Guðlac* describes how the fendemon-fighting saint of Crowland *gewæpnod mid þan wæpne þære Cristes rode and mid þam scylde þæs halgan geleafan* 'armed [himself] with the weapon of the Cross of Christ and with the shield of the holy faith', it seems implied that the Cross-weapon is a sword.⁶⁶

The Dream of the Rood conceives of the Cross as a bloody, golden, radiant *beacen* 'beacon' (compare a burning candle). It is also imagined

61 R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum*, 2 vols (Oxford and New York, 1998–9), I, 218.

62 Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, *William of Malmesbury*, I, 219 translates 'scabbard'.

63 Furthermore, among the relics claimed by Anglo-Saxon Exeter was, according to one text, in addition to a piece of the True Cross, part of *þære candele, ðe Godes engel ontende mid heofenlicum leohte æt ures Drihtenes sepulchre on easteræfen* 'the candle which God's angel kindled with heavenly light at our Lord's sepulchre on Easter Eve'; Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, 153.

64 Additionally, on the link between gold and the divine, see C. Behr, 'The Symbolic Nature of Gold in Magical and Religious Contexts', in *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, <https://finds.org.uk/staffshoardsymposium/papers/charlottebehrr>; K. M. Briggs, 'Symbols in Fairy Tales', in H. R. E. Davidson (ed.), *Symbols of Power* (Cambridge, 1973), 131–55 at 140: 'Gold is a Sun symbol in itself'; P. Dronke and U. Dronke, *Growth of Literature: The Sea and the God of the Sea* (Cambridge, 1998), 40: 'Gold is the symbolic metal of the sun'.

65 O. Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, 3 vols (London, 1864–6), II, 344–7, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139168809>

66 See J. Roberts, 'Guthlac of Crowland and the Seals of the Cross', in Karkov *et al.*, *Place of the Cross*, 113–28 at 115.

as a tree with the power *feondas gefyllan* 'to fell enemies' (38), a weapon that the warrior-Christ clasped about him like a sword.⁶⁷ Also, rather as, when Hroðgar gazes on the giant sword's golden hilt, the *Beowulf*-poet reveals that the hilt was inscribed with the origin of *fyrngewinnes* 'ancient strife' (1689), so too *The Dream of the Rood*'s dreamer perceived *þurh þæt gold* 'through the gold [of the Cross]' *earmra ærgewin* 'the ancient/early strife of wretches' (18–19), which is thought to refer to 'the ancient hostility of God's primeval adversaries'.⁶⁸ In that case, we may also note that Grendel was *earmsceapen* 'wretch-shaped' (*Beowulf* 1351) and that his death would be *earmlíc* 'wretched' (807).⁶⁹

A fragmentary late ninth-century stone grave-marker from Lindisfarne, best known for its depiction of Viking(?) raiders with raised swords and axes, is less well-known for the imagery on its other side. This less familiar side shows a Crucifixion or Doomsday scene dominated by a large standing Cross (now missing part of its shaft) flanked by a full sun to the left and a waning, almost supine, crescent moon to the right (see Figure 3).⁷⁰ Two figures appear in supplication below the Cross, one on the left and one on the right. Additionally, two hands—doubtless those of God or Christ—are depicted, one on either side of the Cross, at the height of its crosspiece. They seem to be about to grasp the Cross by its hilt-like top, perhaps to wield it like a sword against sinners such as the warriors shown on the slab's other side.⁷¹

67 Cherniss, 'Cross'.

68 Swanton, *Dream*, 112. That is, unless the surviving text is a corruption of **earmræ ærgiwinn* 'most [literally 'more'] wretched former struggle', a reference to the Crucifixion, as proposed by A. Bammesberger, 'Earmra ærgewin (*The Dream of the Rood* 19a)', *NM* 100 (1999), 3–5.

69 The latter word especially may pun on 'arm-ly', Grendel having lost an arm (*earm*) to the strength of *Beowulf*'s arm.

70 Also R. Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. Volume I: County Durham and Northumberland* (Oxford, 1984), part 1, 206–7 (no. 37), part 2, pl. 201 (1132–4); R. N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London, 1980), 162–70 and pl. 48. On this scene and the association of the sun and moon with the Crucifixion and Doomsday in pre-Conquest English art, see E. Coatsworth, 'The Iconography of the Crucifixion in Pre-Conquest Sculpture in England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 1978), 42–6, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1862>; B. C. Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival* (Cambridge, 1990); Cashford, *Moon*, 328 also notes the frequency of such imagery in depictions of the Crucifixion.

71 See further the section entitled 'The Lunar Head and the Solar Head' in Chapter 14.



Figure 3. Grave-Marker from Lindisfarne.
© Historic England Archive.

An illustration on folio 6r of London, British Library MS Stowe 944, the *Liber Vitae* ‘Book of Life’ of Newminster and Hyde (c. 1031), shows King Canute placing a large golden cross with four red terminals on the monastery’s altar. He holds the cross in his right hand; his left grasps the hilt of his prominent sword, which has a straight crossguard.⁷² A connection between the cross and the sword seems implicit.

Finally, in later centuries at least, it seems to have been common practice in England to swear oaths on swords, a custom presumably encouraged by cross-shaped hilts.⁷³

(See also the *Supplementary Note at the end of this book for mention of the decoration on a pommel from Dinham, Shropshire and on a sword-grip from Fetter Lane, London.*)

72 http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=stowe_ms_944_f006r. See also T. A. Dubois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia, 1999), 163–5.

73 See E. C. Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, new edn. (London, 1900), 1194 (‘Swear by my Sword’), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001>; J. Gray, ‘“Swear by My Sword”: A Note in Johnson’s *Shakespeare*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27 (1976), 205–8.

Beowulf and Christ as Bearers of the Sword-Cross

Aspects of the poet's portrayal of Beowulf and his actions strongly call to mind Christ and Old Testament 'types' of Christ. These strengthen the possibility that the giant sword intimates the Cross, especially after its blade has melted, leaving only the hilt with crossguard. In addition to the imagery used during Beowulf's adventure in the mere, which evokes Christ's death on the Cross, the Harrowing of Hell and baptism, scholars have drawn parallels between Beowulf and Moses, Samson and David—three Old Testament prefigurations of Christ.⁷⁴ Significant, too, is the description of Beowulf in the poem's final lines as *manna mildust* 'mildest/most benevolent of men' (3181). This phrase is used elsewhere in Old English and Old High German poetry only of Moses and God.⁷⁵

On this basis, a parallel potentially arises between Christ as the bringer of a sword (*Matthew* 10:34) and Beowulf as bringer of the giant sword's hilt to Hroðgar. Furthermore, although Hroðgar, like Beowulf, is a heathen, and therefore unable fully to comprehend the hilt's potential Christian significance, by its acquisition he seems infused with some of the language and precepts of Christianity.⁷⁶ As many other commentators have observed, his resulting speech to Beowulf is reminiscent of a Christian homily: it refers, for instance, to *sawele hyrde* 'the soul's keeper' (1742) and the devil's arrows (1743–6).⁷⁷

74 See Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 93–112; S. H. Horowitz, 'Beowulf, Samson, David and Christ', *Studies in Medieval Culture* 12 (1978), 17–23; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 142–5; F. McFarland, 'The Warrior Kings and Their Giants: A Comparative Study of Beowulf and King David' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Eastern Washington, 2016).

75 See Wieland, 'Manna Mildost'. Cf. F. Klaeber (ed.), *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn. (Lexington, 1950), li: 'We might even feel inclined to recognize features of the Christian Savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends [i.e., Beowulf] Though delicately kept in the background, such a Christian interpretation of the main story on the part of the Anglo-Saxon author could not but give added strength and tone to the entire poem'. The poem's final word on Beowulf, *lofgeornost* (3182), should be interpreted not as 'most vainglorious' (which would obviously undermine any connection with Christ), but as 'most eager to practise praiseworthy giving', according to D. Cronan, 'Lofgeorn: Generosity and Praise', *NM* 92 (1991), 187–94.

76 Note that the blessing of the Easter Candle in the *Missal of Robert of Jumieges* includes the words *Huius ... sanctificatio noctis ... curuat imperia* (Wilson, *Missal*, 91), translatable as 'The sanctification of this night ... bends/moves commanders'; these words recur in the *Sarum Missal*; Legg, *Sarum Missal*, 118.

77 See notes in *KB*, 213–6.

That this 'sermon' was inspired by Hroðgar's examination of the hilt seems implied by the rhyming juxtaposition within the line *Hroðgar maðelode, hylt sceawode* 'Hroðgar made a speech, beheld the hilt' (1687), which is followed not immediately by his speech but by the detailed description, in the poet's voice, of that hilt, which continues until line 1698. Only then does the poet reintroduce Hroðgar's speech—in effect framing the description of the hilt—with the words *Ða se wisa spræc / sunu Healfdenes; swigedon ealle* 'Then the wise man spoke, the son of Healfdene; all fell silent' (1698–9). And it is only subsequently, in line 1700, that we finally come to the words of Hroðgar's speech, a full thirteen lines after its initial introduction.⁷⁸

The Battle-Standard and the Cross

Many correspondences also exist between Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother and subsequent return to Hroðgar on the one hand, and Beowulf's fight with the dragon and its immediate aftermath on the other. Collectively, they imply a parallel between the hilt of the giant sword which Beowulf brings to Hroðgar after slaying the giants and the battle-standard which Wiglaf brings to Beowulf after the slaying of the dragon. Both objects may be interpretable by virtue of their shape as symbolic intimations of the Cross, the weapon with which Christ defeated Satan. Some of these fights' similarities are as follows.⁷⁹

Both fights pit the hero against hot nocturnal monsters in environments with elements in common. The fiery water of Grendel's turbulent mere and the walls of his lair—in which resides his *dragon-skin bag*—echo in the fiery, surging stream issuing from the dragon's stony home (2542–9).

78 Cf. Pope Gregory's reference to a benign *sanctæ prædicationis gladius* 'sword of holy preaching' (*Moralia on Job* 34.17, *PL* 76, column 726); Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 17, 103–5, 118.

79 For further parallels and links between these episodes, which both hinge on the use of an *ealdsweord eotenisc* 'ancient giantish sword' (1558, 2616), see Fontenrose, *Python*, 531–2; Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery'; W. Helder, 'Beowulf and the Plundered Hoard', *NM* 78 (1977), 317–25; D. Cronan, 'The Rescuing Sword', *Neophilologus* 77 (1993), 467–78. Note also my subsequent proposal that all three of Beowulf's main monstrous opponents could be creatures of the dark moon.

As the fine sword Hrunting failed Beowulf against the head of Grendel's mother, so the fine sword *Nægling* 'Descendant of Nail' failed him against the dragon's skull (2575–80, 2677–87).⁸⁰

As the waters of the mere through which Beowulf swam were purged of serpents after the giants' death, so there was no sign of the dragon in its abode, the mound, following its death (2771–2). Additionally, after slaying the dragon, Wiglaf splashed Beowulf with reviving water (2720–3, 2790–1), an act reminiscent of the purifying baptism intimated by Beowulf's immersion in and emersion from Grendel's mere.

As Grendel's lair contained abundant treasure on its *grundwong* 'ground-plain' (1496), so did the dragon's den on its *grundwong* (2770). Spoils were taken from both. The young Beowulf took Grendel's severed head and the golden sword-hilt to the old and righteous King Hroðgar, who then *hylt sceawode, ealde lafe* 'gazed on the hilt, the old "leaving"' (1687–8) and made a wise speech to Beowulf. The young Wiglaf took shining bowls and dishes, but more prominently a single golden battle-standard, to the similarly old and righteous King Beowulf, who then *gold sceawode* 'gazed on the gold' (2793) and made a wise speech to Wiglaf.

The implicit parallel between the giant sword's golden hilt and the golden battle-standard merits closer attention.⁸¹ The poet reports that inside the dragon's lair:

Swylce he siomian geseah segn eall gylden
heah ofer horde, hondwundra mæst,
gelocen leoðocræftum; of ðam leoma stod,
bæt he þone grundwong ongitan meahte,

80 Contrast the sword of Sigemund which effectively 'nailed' another hot dragon to a wall (890–1). Additionally, the term *wællseax* for the weapon with which Beowulf killed his draconic foe is a hapax legomenon whose first element appears significantly polysemous, especially as the *æ* may be long or short. OE *wæl(l)* with short *æ* can mean 'slaughter', which is presumably the principal sense here, but it can also mean 'wall', which would momentarily associate this weapon both with the sword with which Sigemund pinned his dragon to a wall (*wæalle* 891) and with the giant sword which Beowulf took from a wall (*wage* 1662) of Grendel's cave. An association with the giant sword taken from the mere may be reinforced by the suggestion of OE *wæl(l)* with long *æ*, which means 'whirlpool', 'eddy', 'sea', 'flood' (a sense that might also denote the wavy designs on a pattern-welded blade); cf. Beowulf's *wægsweord* 'wave-sword' (1489).

81 See also Abram, 'New Light', 214–5.

wrætte giondwilitan. Næs ðæs wyrmes þær
 onsyn ænig, ac hyne ecg fornam.
 Ða ic on hlæwe gefrægn hord reafian,
 eald enta geweorc, anne mannan,
 him on bearm hladon bunan ond discas
 sylfes dome; segn eac genom,
 beacna beorhtost. (2767–77)

Likewise he [i.e., Wiglaf] saw hanging an all-golden standard, high over the hoard, the greatest of hand-wonders, locked by the crafts of limbs [i.e., by skilful hands]; from it light shone [lit. 'stood'], so that he could make out the ground-plain, look over ornaments. There was not any sign of the snake there, but the edge/sword had carried it off. Then, I have heard, one man [i.e., Wiglaf] plundered the hoard, the old work of giants, in the mound, loaded his chest with cups and dishes according to his own judgement; he also took the standard, brightest of beacons.

Rather as the giant sword's hilt was *wundorsmiþa geweorc* 'the work of wonder-smiths' (1681)—and therefore itself wondrous—and the *enta ærgeweorc* 'earlier work of giants' (1679), so the battle-standard is *hondwundra mæst, / gelocen leoðocræftum* 'the greatest of hand-wonders, locked by the crafts of limbs' (2768–9) and part of the *eald enta geweorc* 'old work of giants' (2774). Also, as Beowulf took the sword from where it hung on the wall of Grendel's lair (1662), presumably above the other treasures therein, so the standard hung above the other treasures in the dragon's den.

Furthermore, the culminating phrase in the passage just quoted, *beacna beorhtost* 'brightest of beacons', appears only twice elsewhere in Old English poetry, with striking significance.⁸² Once it describes the dawn sun rising like a candle from the darkness of the ocean's depths. And once it describes the towering, blood-red Cross shining in place of the sun, which suppresses darkness on Judgement Day.

The former instance comes from *Andreas*, a poem, which, we noted earlier, may well be indebted to *Beowulf*. It comes immediately before the appearance of a ship containing God and two angels:

82 Note also the reference to a *fana ... scir* 'shining standard' of the Goths in Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, 4–5 (*Metre 1*, lines 10–11).

Pa com morgentorht
 beacna beorhtost ofer breomo sneowan,
 halig of heolstre, heofoncandel blac,
 ofer lagoflodas. (241–4)⁸³

Then came the morning-splendid brightest of beacons hastening over the sea,
 holy from darkness, the shining heaven-candle, over the sea-floods.

The second instance occurs in the *Exeter Book's* poem *Christ*:

Ne bið him to are þæt þær fore ellpeodum
 usses dryhtnes rod ondweard stondeð,
 beacna beorhtast, blode bistemed,
 heofoncyniges hlutran dreore,
 biseon mid swate, þæt ofer side gesceaft
 scire scineð. Sceadu beoð bidyrned
 þær se leohta beam leodum byrhteð. (1083–9)⁸⁴

It will not be as an honour to them [i.e., sinners] that there, present before alienated peoples, will stand our Lord's rood, brightest of beacons, wetted with blood, with the pure gore of the heaven-king, sprinkled with 'sweat', so that over [this] broad creation it shines brightly. Shadows will be concealed where the radiant tree shines for peoples.

There is a parallel between the 'heaven-candle' shining over the seas in *Andreas* and *Beowulf's* giant sword, which, I have suggested, shone like the 'sky's candle'. Similarly significant is the correspondence between the radiant, bloody and sweaty Cross of *Christ* and the radiant, bloody and sweaty giant sword.

Another indication of an imagistic connection between the giant sword and the battle-standard in *Beowulf* is an echo of the words *Lixte se leoma, leoht inne stod* 'The radiance shone, light stood within' (1570), used, I have argued, with reference to the giant sword in Grendel's lair. These words echo in the phrase *of ðam leoma stod* (2769), used with reference to the standard in the dragon's lair.

Outside *Beowulf*, further evidence indicates an association between standards and crosses, including the Cross.

83 Brooks, *Andreas*, 8; see also North and Bintley, *Andreas*, 130, with discussion of the poet's likely allusions to *Beowulf* on 62–81.

84 Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, I, 89.

Although our knowledge of early Germanic standards is sketchy, it appears from the survival of a variety of lexical terms and representations on coins that they took several forms. A common variety was essentially cross-shaped, sometimes of tau or tau-like form.⁸⁵

Whatever the standard's physical shape, the word used to describe this object in *Beowulf*, namely *segn* (from Latin *signum*), literally 'sign', also appears in the Old English poem *Exodus* (127) denoting a divine cloud-pillar imagined as a *fana* 'battle-standard' (248). It incorporates a prefigurement of the Cross and is suggestive of an ecclesiastical banner.⁸⁶ The related Old English verb *segnian* commonly means 'to make the sign of the Cross', and a *segnung* is a 'blessing, consecration'.

The Emperor Constantine reportedly had a *labarum* 'standard' that represented the victorious shining Cross. The earliest surviving representation of this standard shows it piercing a wriggling serpent, thought to represent Constantine's rival Licinius but perhaps also Leviathan/Satan.⁸⁷ This tradition was known in Anglo-Saxon England.⁸⁸

Additionally, an association of Christ's glittering royal battle-standards with the Cross is found in the first stanza of a hymn by Venantius Fortunatus, the sixth-century bishop of Poitiers whose work was known in early Anglo-Saxon England.⁸⁹

85 For discussion of Anglo-Saxon royal standards, a surviving instance of which might be among the grave-goods found in Mound One at Sutton Hoo, see R. Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and Other Discoveries* (London, 1974), 7–17 and note fig. 2g; Bruce-Mitford, *Sutton Hoo*, II, 428–31. It has been suggested that the Sutton Hoo object might rather be a flambeau, but this may be an unnecessary distinction. Possibly certain standards were lit in some way; near the top of its vertical shaft the Sutton Hoo object has what might be a metal basket for combustible material. For descriptions of different types of Roman standard, including the *signum*, some of which had crosspieces, see A. Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army* (London, 2003), 134–5; M. E. V. Schmöger, 'The Roman Vexillum', in J. O. Engene (ed.), *Proceedings of the XX International Congress on Vexillology, Stockholm, 27th July to 1st August 2003* (Bergen, 2004), 511–42.

86 Lucas, *Exodus*, 96, 110.

87 P. Stephenson, *Constantine: Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor* (London, 2009), 185 and fig. 41.

88 See I. Wood, 'Constantinian Crosses in Northumbria', in Karkov *et al.*, *Place of the Cross*, 3–13.

89 See M. Lapidge, 'Knowledge of the Poems of Venantius Fortunatus in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* (London, 1996), 399–407. Any future researchers in this field, and others covered by the present book, will want to review the huge body of Christian Latin literature known in Anglo-Saxon England, which I am conscious of having largely neglected. For a recent discussion of some key works, see P. McBrine, *Biblical Epics in Late Antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England: Divina in Laude Voluntas* (Toronto, 2017).

Vexilla regis prodeunt,
 fulget crucis mysterium,
 quo carne carnis conditor
 suspensus est patibulo.⁹⁰

The king's banners advance, the mystery of the Cross flashes, by which the Creator of flesh was suspended in flesh from a forked gibbet.

This hymn, which presumably describes the image of the Cross glittering on banners, was used in the Easter ritual of the *Regularis concordia*.⁹¹

Old English texts similarly identify the Cross as a shining *beacen* 'beacon, standard'. It is so described repeatedly, for example, in *The Dream of the Rood* (6, 21, 83, 118). Furthermore, the Cross, like the *segn* of *Beowulf*, is often described as golden. Some golden Anglo-Saxon crosses survive to this day.

Finally, an association between early English Christian crosses, banners and candles is apparent from an account by an eleventh-century hagiographer, Goscelin of Saint-Bertin. It tells how a visitor to the old minster of East Dereham, Norfolk, in the late eleventh century saw the local people process, with priests and other clergy, *cum uexillis et crucibus, cum cereis* 'with banners and crosses, with candles'.⁹²

Wiglaf as Sword-Bearer and Cross-Bearer

A further implicit connection between the giant sword's hilt and the Cross-like battle-standard taken from the dragon's den may well be encapsulated in the name and actions of the standard's bearer, Wiglaf. He is unknown outside *Beowulf*, and in the opinion of at least one commentator his name is 'probably a kenning, and certainly a metaphor'.⁹³

90 F. Leo (ed.), *Venanti Honori Clementiani Fortvnati presbyteri italici opera poetica*, MGH, auctorum antiquissimorum 4 (Berlin, 1881), 34.

91 Symons, *Monastic Agreement*, 42–3 (§44). On this poem and its use in the Monastic Office in pre-Conquest England, see I. B. Milfull, 'Hymns to the Cross: Contexts for the Reception of *Vexilla regis prodeunt*', in Karkov et al., *Place of the Cross*, 43–57.

92 R. C. Love (ed. and trans.), *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford, 2004), 60–1.

93 Lee, *Gold-Hall*, 60.

The name *Wiglaf* is, like so much else in the poem, engagingly interpretable in more than one way. The most obvious interpretation, as 'Battle-Leaving', identifies its bearer as:

- (a) 'Survivor', not just in terms of the dragon-fight, but also of being the last surviving member, the *endelaf* 'end-leaving' (2813), of Beowulf's kin.
- (b) 'Sword', a sword conceptually being the iron 'left behind' after the 'battle' waged against it by a smith's hammer-blows.⁹⁴ It was Wiglaf who subdued the dragon with a glittering, gold-adorned blade. We may recall the implicit identity of Beowulf and giant sword as *secg* 'man/sword' during the mere-episode. We may also call to mind how the giant sword was recovered after the battle with Grendel's mother, and especially what remained of it—the hilt, the 'leaving' (*laf* 1688) which Beowulf presented to Hroðgar, and which the latter gazed upon, rather as Beowulf beheld the standard and, at the same time, Wiglaf.
- (c) 'Heirloom'/'Spoils', a meaning that reinforces Wiglaf's link with the standard he took from the dragon's den,⁹⁵ and that again recalls the giant sword and its hilt.

A fourth possible interpretation of *Wiglaf* is:

- (d) 'Holy Leaving',⁹⁶ which invites a Christian interpretation.

I therefore suggest that the figure of the standard- and sword-bearing Wiglaf evokes, upon reflection, a blended image of the Cross-like standard and the giant sword's Cross-like hilt. Like the young Beowulf before him, the valiant Wiglaf foreshadows Christ, himself a sword- and Cross-bearer who conquered the devil-serpent.⁹⁷

94 For instances of *laf* denoting swords in *Beowulf*, see KB, 404 (glossary entry for this word).

95 Cf. ON *vé* 'standard'.

96 OE *wig*, cognate with Gothic *weihs* 'holy' and OHG *wih* 'holy', is associated with the divine or supernatural in the sense 'idol, image'; also in Old English compounds like *wiggild* 'idol', *wigle* 'divination' and *wigweorþung* 'idol-worship/honour' (*Beowulf* 176). Note especially the related weak noun *wiga* 'holy one', probably used of the Holy Spirit, in the Old English poem *Elene* (937); see P. O. E. Gradon (ed.), *Cynewulf's 'Elene'*, rev. edn. (Exeter, 1977), 61.

97 In this light, Wiglaf's splashing of Beowulf with water looks even more like an intimation of baptism, one that echoes Beowulf's earlier emergence from the purified mere.

On the foregoing basis, it seems to me likely that both the golden-hilted giant sword and Wiglaf's golden battle-standard are interpretable as intimations of the glittering Cross of Christ. This appreciation not only encourages perception of a more obscure association between the giant sword and another prominent Christian symbol, the Paschal Candle. It also colours in retrospect our view of both the *segen gyldenne* 'golden standard' (1021) which Hroðgar presented to Beowulf along with the sword of Healfdene, and the *segen gyldenne* (47), erected much earlier amid other treasures, in Scyld Scefing's burial-ship. The *Beowulf*-poet, it seems to me, may intimate symbolically the presence of the Cross not only at the centre of *Beowulf*, but also at its beginning and end.⁹⁸

98 Cf. Nicholson, 'Literal Meaning', 188.

PART II.

Sun-Swords and Moon-Monsters

On the Theft and Recovery of Sunlight
in *Beowulf* and Other Early Northern Texts

5. Whose Sword Is it, Anyway?

So far, I have proposed that the giant sword of *Beowulf* is a likely weapon of solar radiance, one that intimates two potent symbols of Christianity: the candle (possibly more specifically the Paschal Candle) and the Cross. It might, however, be objected that a Christian poet would not equate his religion's prime symbols with a weapon forged and possessed by devilish giants. Two main responses may be offered to such an objection.

The first is simply that the Cross was also considered the weapon of evil-doers. It too was a weapon which Christ similarly turned against Satan.

The second is that although the giant sword was kept by giants and forged by giants (*giganta geweorc*, 1562), and although giants often die by their own weapons,¹ this does not necessarily mean that this weapon was originally or rightfully theirs. It seems to me possible, even probable, that they stole or arrogated the sword and then hung it on their wall as a trophy. After all, neither Grendel nor his mother use this sword, or even attempt to, and its destiny was clearly to slay them. And although one scholar has argued persuasively that the sword's hilt was probably inscribed with words describing Cain's murder of Abel, it does not necessarily follow that the sword

1 For Norse instances, see D. J. Beard, 'Á þá bitu engi járn: A Brief Note on the Concept of Invulnerability in the Old Norse Sagas', in P. M. Tilling (ed.), *Studies in English Language and Early Literature in Honour of Paul Christophersen* ([n.p.] New University of Ulster, 1981), 13–31. In the Old Testament there is the notable example of the unique sword of the Philistine giant Goliath, which David—a 'type' of Christ—took to behead him (1 *Samuel* 17:51; 1 *Samuel* 21:9); on this weapon, see S. Isser, *The Sword of Goliath: David in Heroic Literature* (Leiden, 2003), 34–7. Recall also the beheading of Holofernes by Judith, although in the Old English poem *Judith* (unlike its Biblical source and a homily by Ælfric on this story) it is not explicitly his own sword that beheads him.

was forged and inscribed by giant-smiths 'to celebrate and advance the malice of God's enemies'.² Furthermore, the gold of the sword's prominent hilt invites—but obviously in no way proves—attribution to a divine origin, since gold is commonly associated with divinity.³ We may compare, for example, Jeremiah's presentation to Judah/Judas of a holy sword of gold, a gift from God, with which to destroy his enemies in *2 Maccabees* 15:11–6, almost at the juncture of the Old and New Testaments in the Vulgate Bible.

Giant-Forged and Giant-Stolen?

There are several questions concerning the giant, probably sun-like sword: who first owned it? Who was its rightful owner? And why did giants forge it? *Beowulf* offers no clear answers. In probing the matter, I therefore do not intend to answer these questions definitively, but rather to provide some illumination. The poet appears enigmatic, even evasive, on this matter, I suggest, because he wanted to blur the distinction between different extra-Biblical Christian and pagan Germanic traditions (these last to be examined later in this study). To have identified the precise nature of the hilt's inscription, or to have named the giant sword's original owner, would have unbalanced his fusion of Judaeo-Christian and Germanic by emphasizing one or the other. I believe he wanted to encourage rumination on the congruences of Christian and heathen Germanic traditions. By remaining vague, he enables both perspectives to co-exist and confers a powerful focus and a sense of mystery upon the sword's hilt.

This dual perspective appears operative in his description of the sword's creators. These are initially devouring Scandinavian giants, *eotenas*, like Grendel: the giant sword is introduced as an *ealdsweord eotenisc* 'eoten-ish old-sword' (1558). But the poem's giants, as descendants of Cain, also have a Biblical, etymologically Latinate

2 D. Cronan, 'Origin', 66. Cf. McNelis III, 'Sword Mightier than the Pen?', 177–8: 'that the sword came out of the water does not prove that it originated there. The lair in *Beowulf* strongly resembles the troll-cave or grave-mound of the analogous passages in other tales of this type. In those versions of the story, the ground is littered with treasures looted from earlier victims or buried in (human) graves.'

3 See Chapter 4 n. 64. Its hilt is not explicitly the work of giants but *wundorsmipa* 'of wonder-smiths' (1681).

aspect: the same passage soon describes the same weapon as *god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc* ‘good and splendid/well-equipped, the work of giants’ (1562), where *giganta* is a Latin loanword. This is an arresting combination because at least some *gigantas* ‘giants’ (not necessarily all) were earlier identified not as good beings, but as *evil*-doers who had warred against God for a long time (113–4). It seems, then, that a weapon quite possibly made by evil-doers is of great virtue.

How much significance, positive or negative, to attribute to the sword’s manufacture by giants is unclear. It is curious that none of the ‘giantish’ swords and pieces of armour mentioned in *Beowulf* are wielded by (non-human) giants: neither the giant sword, which is *ealdsweord eotonisc ... giganta geweorc ... enta ærgeweorc* ‘a giantish old-sword ... the work of giants ... the early work of giants’ (1558, 1562, 1679); nor the *ealdsweord etonisc* wielded by Wiglaf (2616); nor the *ealdsweord eotonisc* which broke the *entiscne helm* ‘giantish helm’ of the Swedish king Ongenþeow (2979).⁴ Since, of these items, only the giant sword is explicitly of giantish manufacture, the other swords and the helmet might just be ‘giant-like/giant-sized’. Possibly it was simply honorific convention to describe the best and oldest arms and armour, wielded by the greatest men, as ‘giantish’, ‘the work of giants’.⁵

On the other hand, if we do attribute considerable significance to the giant sword’s manufacture by giants, a key detail may be that its hilt is *rihte gemearcod* ‘rightly marked’ (1695) with a runic inscription about the

4 Additionally, the dragon’s den is *enta geweorc* ‘the work of giants’ (2717) and the dragon’s hoard *eald enta geweorc* ‘the old work of giants’. For a study of such phrases, see P. J. Frankis, ‘The Thematic Significance of *Enta Geweorc* and Related Imagery in *The Wanderer*’, *ASE* 2 (1973), 253–69. Frankis observes that in *Beowulf* ‘the *entas* seem to be creatures similar in function to the dwarves of Norse myth as workers in metal and makers of treasures’ (254). In a Norse saga discussed in Chapter 14 we may meet one such metal-working ‘giant’ in an episode analogous to *Beowulf*’s fight with Grendel’s mother: A troll-woman called *Sleggja* ‘Sledgehammer’. Some other giants whom we shall encounter have names containing *Járn* ‘Iron’ or live in *Járnviðr* ‘Iron-Wood’.

5 F. Battaglia, ‘Cannibalism in *Beowulf* and Older Germanic Religion’, in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: The World Through Their Eyes* (Oxford, 2014), 141–8 at 145–6 considers that the indication that the *eotenas* made the best of ancient swords in a poem in which ‘the *eotenas* themselves were objects of hatred ... suggests that a struggle about interpreting the past was still under way when the poem was composed. The power of *eotenic* swords may have been a stock motif of Germanic lore, not yet modified in light of a new framework about *eotenas* being asserted in the poem.’

or .../ *fyrngewinnes* 'origin ... of ancient strife' (1688–9). When, by whom and why this inscription was made is open to question.⁶ The exact subject of the inscription is another enigma, but, as just noted, Cain's murder of Abel seems likely from a Judaeo-Christian perspective. Did Old Testament giants forge the sword and inscribe its hilt in celebration of this crime after it had been committed? Or did they do so in anticipation of the crime? Was the giant sword the very weapon with which Cain *wearð / to ecgbanan* 'became edge/sword-slayer' (1261–2) of Abel? And could evil giants be said to have marked the sword *rihte* 'rightly'?⁷ These questions arise as a result of the poet's deliberate imprecision, which means they cannot be answered conclusively.

What we may quickly observe, however, is that giants apparently can 'mark' in *Beowulf*. The hero raises the possibility that Grendel would eat him and in the process *mearcað morhopu* 'mark (his) moor-retreats' (450), presumably with blood, but what form these marks would take—random, meaningless gore-splatters or ritualized blood-runes?⁸—is anyone's guess.⁹ The poem's more prominent 'marker', though, is God. He had *forscrifen* 'written off/proscribed' (106) Grendel as one of the kin of Cain, who after killing Abel had fled *morpre gemearcod* 'marked by murder' (1264).¹⁰ More subtly, after the death of Grendel and his

6 J. B. Himes (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Epic of Waldere* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), 107 n. 14, for example, remarks: 'The fact that hilts were not fashioned as part of the original blade (not connected to the lower tang but crafted separately and applied later) would explain how the giants' sword contains the tale of its own makers' demise. If the blade had been forged by the ancient race of giants, surviving their destruction by flood but later recognized as that legendary weapon, then artisans after the flood could have inscribed its history on a newly fashioned hilt for it.' I doubt, however, that the giant sword does contain such a tale.

7 Note that *rihte* bears the line's main alliterative stress and therefore some emphasis.

8 For Battaglia, 'Cannibalism in *Beowulf*', 144 this 'sounds as if Grendel conducts bog rituals with human corpses'.

9 Anglo-Saxon literature also preserves a tradition that the person who *ærost bocstafas sette* 'first set (down) book-staves [i.e., Latinate letters, not runes]' (compare *Beowulf's* *runstafas ... geseted ... ærest*) or who *wrat bocstafas ærest* 'wrote book-staves first' was *Mercurius se gygand/gigant* 'Mercury the giant'; see J. E. Cross and T. D. Hill (ed.), *The Prose Solomon and Saturn and Adrian and Ritheus* (Toronto, 1982), 34, 36, with commentary on 122–3. This Mercury is Hermes Trismegistus, but note also the equation of the Roman god Mercury with the Migration Age form of Woden/Óðinn in the *interpretatio germanica*. Óðinn, whose ancestors included a giant, was the lord of runes.

10 On the significance of marking in *Beowulf*, see Sharma, 'Metalepsis and Monstrosity'. All of the poem's main monsters are implicitly undone by writing, a form of marking. Grendel was *forscrifen* 'written off/proscribed' (106) by God as one of the

mother, the poet describes God as one who controls *sæla ond mæla* (1611), a phrase interpretable broadly as ‘time and seasons’, but more literally as ‘good times and mark(er)s’.¹¹

It is one thing to consider attributing runic literacy to giants, but potentially quite another to state that in inscribing a terrible crime the giants had written *rightly*. A simplistic, literal-minded interpretation might take *rihte* simply to mean that the giants had spelt their words *correctly* (unlike many a historical rune-carver). This, though, would be blind to the sword’s paramount role in executing divine ‘right/justice’ (*ryht*, 1555). Accordingly, the giants could only be said to have inscribed *rightly* in hindsight, by someone with faith in the workings of divine providence. In the fullness of time, when Beowulf wielded the giant sword, it might then be appreciated that the giants had unknowingly anticipated the will of God—had done the right thing—by marking the weapon destined to destroy the last of their race with the justification for their eradication. The unjust weapon of the enemy would become the just weapon of God.

race of Cain, on whom God had famously left a ‘mark’. Grendel and his mother were beheaded by the rune-inscribed giant sword, which was ‘marked’. And in using his short-sword to kill the dragon that had ravaged his kingdom, Beowulf *forwrat ... wyrm on middan* “‘wrote apart’ the worm in the middle’ (2705). Some of the poem’s less important monsters may also have been ‘written’ to death, though much less obviously. It seems likely that the *hildebill* ‘battle-bill’, the *deoran sweorde* ‘dear sword’ (with a pun on ‘beast-sword?’), with which Beowulf slew the *mihtig meredeor* ‘mighty mere-beast’ during his swimming-match with Breca is identifiable as the *wægsweord* ‘wave-sword’ which he entrusted to Unferð before diving into the mere. This sword is most likely a double of the giant sword, and therefore had to be out of the hero’s hands for the poet to continue his narrative (note that Drout *et al.*, *Beowulf Unlocked*, 62 finds that there is evidence ‘to support the idea that the Unferth and Breca material has a source different from the rest of *Beowulf*’). The giant sword, we have seen, was inscribed with writing (it is the only explicitly literary object in the poem), while the sword which Unferð received from Beowulf is an *ealde lafe, wrætlic wægsweord ... heardecg* ‘old leaving/heirloom, an ornamented wave-sword ... a hard edge’ (1488–90), in which *wrætlic* ‘ornamented’, from *wrætt* ‘ornament’, ‘work of art’, is related to *writan* ‘to write, score, incise’. For its part, Sigemund’s *sward þurhwod wrætlicne wyrm, þæt hit on wealle ætstod, dryhtlic iren* ‘sword penetrated through the *wrætlic* worm, so that it stood in the wall, the lordly iron’ (890–2). It is conceivable that Sigemund’s dragon is fleetingly imagined as an inscribed trophy hanging from a wall—like the giant sword before it melted. For its part, Grendel’s head, severed by the giant sword, is also *wrætlic* (1650). In *Beowulf*, it seems, the pen (or incising tool) is not so much mightier than the sword, as identified with the sword.

11 Cf. Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 261.

That is one possibility, but another explanation of the giants' possession of a rightly inscribed sword also appears attractive as it accounts for neglected indications in *Beowulf* and its analogues that Grendel and his mother were sword-thieves. We noted the most important internal indications of this earlier: the description of Grendel as a *heorowearh* 'sword-thief' (1267) (if this translation is accepted) and his mother as *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' (1498). I shall adduce other such indications in due course.¹²

We shall also see on the basis of analogues in Old Norse and Old English texts that, from one perspective, in the back-story to *Beowulf* Grendel may well have stolen the giant sword—possibly from its Danish guardians in Heorot—partly to satisfy his desire, and that of his mother, as alien beings identified with the moon, for sunlight. And if Grendel and his mother were sword-thieves, it would seem likely that the sun-like giant sword which enacts divine justice upon them:

- (a) Was originally the rightful possession, not of evil giants, but of a benign solar deity, one tacitly identified with the Christian God the Father, whose radiant son overcame devils with a divine sword during the Harrowing of Hell.¹³
- (b) Had been made and inscribed for this deity by giants, who were perhaps evil at the time or subsequently became so. Notably, amid the hilt's description, the words *geworht ... / ærest wære* 'made ... was first' (1696–7)—with alliterative stress on *ærest* 'first'—imply a change of ownership for the giant sword, though not necessarily between opposing parties.
- (c) Was stolen or arrogated and kept by Grendel and his mother, but never used by them, because they knew it was destined to destroy them.¹⁴

Such knowledge of the fatal threat from a sword would explain the magical spell which Grendel cast on *sigewæpnum* 'victorious weapons'

12 Christian crosses, it may be added, were also the subject of theft-narratives in Anglo-Saxon England; see Dubois, *Nordic Religions*, 143.

13 In probably the oldest surviving vernacular Anglo-Saxon account of the Harrowing of Hell, the late eighth- or ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* describes Christ as a bright light who strikes devils with his *godcunde sweorde* 'divine sword'; see C. Rauer (ed.), *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge, 2013), 74.

14 Cf. Nagler, 'Beowulf', 146.

(804), so that even the *irenna cyst* 'choicest of iron weapons' (802) might not harm him. It would also account for his refusal to wield a sword himself (677–87);¹⁵ instead of brandishing the giant sword that hung on his wall, he uses his terrible arm and nailed hand, which, I shall later propose, the poet may subtly identify with grim relish as an 'un/bad-sword' (*unheoru* 987). That Grendel had the giant sword especially in mind when he cast his spell may be suggested by this weapon's introduction as *sigeeadig* 'victory-eager' (1557) and *wæpna cyst* 'the choicest of weapons' (1559). We have, furthermore, already seen that Snarvendill, a likely Old Norse counterpart to this sword, was made by dwarves, relatives of giants,¹⁶ and potentially held by Vargeisa unrightfully. Greek mythology may also supply a pertinent parallel in the Cyclopes' forging of Zeus' thunderbolts, which were later stolen by the giant Typhoeus (after a tip-off from his mother, Gaia) and hidden in a cave, before eventually being recovered.¹⁷

In this way, giants who were evil, or who subsequently became so, could have forged and rightly marked the good giant sword. And, given that all things were deemed to be under God's control and that he evidently intended the giant sword to slay its captors and then return to Heorot, this weapon might also be subtly described from this perspective as *þas lænan gesceaft* 'this loaned creation' (1622).¹⁸

The Giant Sword and the Theft of Mjöllnir

If the giant-made giant sword was indeed stolen by giants from a solar god or his people before being recovered by Beowulf, these events would appear comparable not just to those concerning Zeus' thunderbolts.

15 Earlier, Beowulf says he has heard that Grendel *for his wonhydum wæpna ne recceð* (434) 'on account of his *recklessness* does not care for [or 'about'] weapons', but this is hearsay, not the poet's authoritative explanation.

16 If the supernatural swordsmith Weland, mentioned in *Beowulf* and other Old English texts, were a giant, this would strengthen perception of a Germanic tradition about the making of swords by such creatures. Weland is associated with a megalithic ('giant stone') tomb in Oxfordshire: Wayland's Smithy. His father, Wade, appears in Old Norse as the giant Vaði; see W. McConnell, *The Wate Figure in Medieval Tradition* (Berne, 1978). However, the Old Norse *Völundr* is an *álfa ljóði* 'prince of elves' in the Eddic poem *Völundarkviða* 'Völundr's Poem' (10).

17 See W. Hansen, 'The Theft of the Thunderweapon: A Greek Myth in its International Context', *C&M* 46 (1995), 5–24.

18 Cf. Risden, *Beasts of Time*, 97. See further Chapter 9.

They would also call to mind those involving *Mjöllnir* ‘Crusher’, the dwarf-forged lightning-hammer of Þórr.¹⁹

According to the Old Norse Eddic poem *Þrymskviða* ‘The Lay of Þrymr’, *Mjöllnir* was stolen (quite possibly by the trickster-god Loki) and kept in deep concealment underground by the giant *Þrymr* ‘Thunderous One’.²⁰ There it remained until Þórr went to recover it, accompanied by Loki. Despite being ludicrously disguised as the goddess Freyja, Þórr succeeded in reacquiring his weapon and immediately used it to slay both *Þrymr* and the giant’s anonymous sister in their home.²¹

Helen Damico has shown the likely relevance of *Þrymskviða* to the middle section of *Beowulf*, and vice versa.²² She argues that these poems are bound together by ‘the strength of the Nordic literary tradition’, and that the Old English poem ‘serves as an index to the [Old Norse] lay’s comic mode.’²³ She observes similarities in their narrative structures, with Grendel’s mother, as thief of Grendel’s severed hand, corresponding to the giant *Þrymr* who guards Þórr’s stolen hammer (or rather, I suggest, to his acquisitive sister). In my view, however, Damico goes too far when equating the giant sword with *Mjöllnir* on the supposed basis of a similarity of shape.²⁴ Even if the giant sword were curved and hook-tipped (for which there is no convincing evidence),

19 For further thoughts on the relationships of *Mjöllnir* and other divine instruments of Norse mythology to the Cross, see Dubois, *Nordic Religions*, 158–63.

20 For an argument that *Þrymskviða* has ‘some Anglo-Norse origins’, see J. McKinnell, ‘Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England’, in J. Graham-Campbell, R. Hall, J. Jesch and D. N. Parsons (ed.), *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21–30 August 1997* (Oxford, 2001), 327–44 at 334–9.

21 Neckel and Kuhn, *Edda*, 111–5. For discussions of this myth, see Hansen, ‘Theft’; Frog, ‘Circum-Baltic Mythology? The Strange Case of the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b)’, *Archaeologia Baltica* 15 (2011), 78–98, http://briai.ku.lt/downloads/AB/15/15_078-098_Frog.pdf; Frog, ‘Germanic Traditions of the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b): An Approach to *Þrymskviða* and Þórr’s Adventure with Geirröðr in Circum-Baltic Perspective’, in E. Heidar and K. Bek-Pedersen (ed.), *New Focus on Retrospective Methods: Resuming Methodological Discussions: Case Studies from Northern Europe* (Helsinki, 2014), 120–62; Frog, ‘Mythology in Cultural Practice’; and Frog, ‘When Thunder Is Not Thunder; or, Fits and Starts in the Evolution of Mythology’, in Ü. Valk and D. Sävborg (ed.), *Storied and Supernatural Places: Studies in Spatial and Social Dimensions of Folklore and Sagas* (Helsinki, 2018), 137–58.

22 H. Damico, ‘*Þrymskviða* and *Beowulf*’s Second Fight: The Dressing of the Hero in Parody’, *SS* 58 (1986), 407–28. See also Puhvel, *Beowulf*, 33–4.

23 Damico, ‘*Þrymskviða*’, 423.

24 Damico, ‘*Þrymskviða*’, 421–2.

and even if both it and Mjöllnir had hilts furnished with a ring, it seems to me rather far-fetched to liken the sword's overall form to 'the double-axed thunderbolt of Zeus'.²⁵ Simply put, a sword is neither a hammer nor an axe. Although the giant sword's form comes closer to that of Mjöllnir once it has been reduced to its hilt, we do better, I think, to consider the giant sword and Mjöllnir broadly equivalents as large, heavy weapons of heavenly light,²⁶ the former solar, the latter (originally at least) fulgural, wielded by comparable champions associated with the weather.²⁷ It is likely, in my view, that either weapon was stolen or illicitly kept by a giant who lived with, and was perhaps prompted by, a giantess, before being recovered by a champion of supernatural strength, who immediately used it to kill the thieves.

The Cup-Thief, Grendel's Glove and Grendel's 'Un-Sword': Aspects of Recurrent Thievery in *Beowulf*

If the theft of the giant sword is implicit, essentially hidden in the background, and therefore open to question, perception of its likelihood may strengthen with the appreciation that thievery—as distinct from the apparently sanctioned practice of spoliation after open warfare (see below)—is a recurrent theme in *Beowulf*. It is an important aspect of each of the poem's three main monster-episodes, in each of which it is prominently associated with a hand or hands.

The most obvious instance of theft in *Beowulf* is the last and most catastrophic: the taking of a precious drinking-cup from the lair of a

25 Damico, 'Brymskviða', 421.

26 With regard to Mjöllnir's weight, a Norwegian ballad refers to *Thor með tungum hamrum* 'Thor with heavy hammer'; M. B. Landstad (ed.), *Norske folkeviser* (Christiania, 1853), 14; L. Korecká, 'Óðin stoyttist í jörðina niður: Magic and Myth in the Faroese Ballads', *Arv* 73 (2017), 91–113 at 99 considers this detail 'a remnant of an older, forgotten tradition'.

27 *Beowulf* is a member of the *Weder-Geatas* 'We(a)ther-Geats', one who *styrmd* 'stormed' at a dragon (2552); cf. Fontenrose, *Python*, 64 on the interchangeability of champions' weapons in related myths. Since the hilt of the giant sword is prominent in *Beowulf*, it is of interest that the handles of one or two of Þórr's weapons are also conspicuous in one or two myths. According to the story of the creation of the gods' treasures by dwarves, Loki's meddling resulted in Mjöllnir having a defect: *forskeptit var heldr skamt* 'the end of the handle [or perhaps the part of the shaft that went through the head of the weapon] was rather short'; *SnESkald*, I, 42. Elsewhere, the thunder-god's oaken club is rendered useless by having its handle cut off; *GD*, I, 152–3.

sleeping dragon by the *hond* 'hand' (2216) of a man, by *þeofes cræfte* 'thief's craft' (2219).²⁸ This event and the dragon's sudden revenge, which leads to the hero's death and the seemingly unavoidable destruction of his kingdom, suggest a fiery apocalypse. To an audience familiar with basic Christian analogy, this would also call to mind a thief, given that the day of the Lord would come *ut fur* 'as a thief', with element-destroying heat (2 *Peter* 3:10; cf. 1 *Thessalonians* 5:2; *Revelation* 3:3, 16:15).

Whether or not he stole the giant sword, Grendel is also a thief in the first third of *Beowulf*. He effectively stole food, in the form of men, from Heorot by night, by approaching and attacking while people slept. Those whom he did not devour on the spot, like the peculiarly named *Hondscioh* 'Hand-Shoe [i.e., Glove]' (2076–80), he stuffed inside his *glof* 'glove' and carried home. Judging by the contents of his lair, he probably also took their weapons and armour (*searwum*, 1557). This, *Beowulf* says, is what Grendel intended to do with him:

'Glof hangode,
sid ond syllic, searobendum fæst;
sio wæs orðoncum eall gegyrwed
deofles cræftum ond dracan fellum.
He mec þær on innan unsynnigne,
dior dædfruma, gedon wolde
manigra sumne.' (2085–91)

'A glove hung, broad and strange, secure with cunningly wrought bands; it was by skills [literally 'original thoughts'] all equipped with a/the devil's powers and with a dragon's skins. He, the brave deed-originator [or 'beast of deed-originators'], wanted to put me, guiltless, inside there, as one of many.'

Grendel's *glof* apparently served a dual purpose. Unless we attribute this word the unique sense 'bag',²⁹ it was principally a 'glove', presumably for his remarkable, weapon-like hand. As such, rather than providing warmth, it may have served chiefly to protect against unintended injury to himself or his mother, and to prevent rust. Its secondary use was as a swag-bag, potentially not just for food. Especially if the glove did serve as a cover for Grendel's pointed weapon of a hand, given that it was

²⁸ See T. M. Andersson, 'The Thief in *Beowulf*', *Speculum* 59 (1984), 493–508, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2846296>

²⁹ See *KB*, 233.

fastened by presumably supernatural power and made from dragon-skin—a remarkable hide which contained and resisted fire—it would seem a highly suitable substitute bag in which to place a stolen solar sword. Allowing for some differences of detail, Grendel’s glove probably finds parallel in both the *hanzki* ‘mitten’ (compare *Hondscioh*) and the *nestbaggi* ‘food-bag’ of the giant *Skrýmir* ‘Big-Looking One(?)’³⁰ (alias *Útgarða-Loki*), described one after the other in a tale from *Gylfaginning* ‘The Beguiling of Gylfi’, part of Snorri’s *Prose Edda*.³¹ This story relates that Þórr mistook *Skrýmir*’s glove for a house and spent a wakeful, fearful night in its thumb, along with his companions and his lightning-hammer. The next morning Þórr and *Skrýmir* pooled their provisions in the latter’s bag, which Þórr later failed to open because, we eventually learn, the giant had *bundit með grésjárni* ‘bound it with handicraft-iron’.³² As *Skrýmir* is also attested as a term for ‘sword’,³³ might this bag once have held a sword?

That leaves *Beowulf*’s middle section, and Grendel’s mother, whose taking of her son’s severed arm (and *Æschere*) Helen Damico has commented on (see above). There is more to be said about it, however. Judging from Anglo-Saxon laws, the periodic sounding of a horn by the men who, having passed a boundary stone, entered the land of Grendel and his mother (1423–4, 1431–2), signalled that they (unlike the giants) did not come covertly as thieves.³⁴ Although the repossession of

30 On this name, see Chapter 14 n. 112.

31 *SnEGylf*, 37–43. Cf. E. D. Laborde, ‘Grendel’s Glove and his Immunity from Weapons’, *MLR* 18 (1923), 202–4, who, however, compares only *Skrýmir*’s glove and expresses uncertainty about whether Grendel uses his glove as a bag (despite *Beowulf*’s certitude). See also S. Lerer, ‘Grendel’s Glove’, *ELH* 61 (1994), 721–51; Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 66–8.

32 *SnEGylf*, 43; on the uncertain meaning of *grésjárni*, see *ibid.*, 102. Þórr’s failure to open the bag is also alluded to in the Eddic poem *Lokasenna* ‘Loki’s Flyting’ (62), in which *Skrýmir* could be the name of either the giant or his bag. I shall have more to say about Loki, who appears in this story both as one of Þórr’s companions and, seemingly, as *Skrýmir*’s alter ego.

33 See *SnESkald*, I, 118, II, 507; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 59; *PTP*, 791–2. In two thirteenth-century Icelandic texts, *Kormáks saga* and *Egils saga*, it is the name of a special sword named after the giant.

34 See W. Cooke, ‘Two Notes on *Beowulf* (With Glances at *Vafþrúðnismál*, Blickling Homily 16, and *Andreas*, Lines 839–846)’, *MÆ* 72 (2003), 297–301 at 299. Similarly, *Beowulf* openly declares his presence to the dragon by issuing a mighty warcry (2550–3). Consequently, Wiglaf’s acquisition of treasures from the hoard is an act not of theft, but of legitimate ‘reaving’ (*reafian* 2773; cf. *bereafod* 2746, 2825). For a different interpretation, which compares Christ as thief with *Beowulf* as plunderer of the dragon’s hoard, see Helder, ‘*Beowulf* and the Plundered Hoard’.

Grendel's arm doubtless seemed justified to his mother, it is probably identifiable as a theft not just because the giants are inherently evil, but more precisely because Grendel's loss corresponded to a just legal punishment for theft.³⁵ Since, as I shall now suggest, the poet likens Grendel's arm, or each of its nails, to a pointed weapon, it is conceivable that its seizure by Beowulf on behalf of the Danes amounted to a just reciprocation for Grendel's theft of the giant sword from the Danes.

After describing how Hroðgar *geseah* 'saw' (926) Grendel's severed right arm,³⁶ and how the king thanked God for the marvel of Grendel's defeat, and after giving Beowulf's account of his victory, the poet continues:

Da wæs swigra secg, sunu Eclafes,
 on gylpspræce guðgeweorca,
 siþðan æbelingas eorles cræfte
 ofer heanne hrof hand sceawedon,
 feondes fingras; foran æghwylc wæs,
 steda nægla gehwylc style gelicost,
 hæþenes handsporu, hilderinces,
 egl' unheoru. Æghwylc gecwæð
 þæt him heardra nan hrinan wolde
 iren ærgod, þæt ðæs ahlæcan
 blodge beadufolme onberan wolde. (980–90)

Then the man, Ec(g)laf's son [i.e., Unferð], was quieter in boasting of battle-deeds, when princes, on account of the strength of the nobleman [i.e., Beowulf], gazed upon the hand across the high roof, the enemy's fingers; in front each, each of the places of nails, was just like steel, the hand-spur(?) of a heathen, of a battle-man—horrible(?), unpleasant [or 'a horrible un-/

35 Cf. V. Allen, 'When Compensation Costs an Arm and a Leg', in J. P. Gates and N. Marafioti (ed.), *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2014), 17–33 at 31: 'The hand is ... the limb that is predominantly struck off in punishment under barbarian law. Theft is the obvious deed for which loss of the hand is required as punishment'. See also L. Lockett, 'The Role of Grendel's Arm in Feud, Law, and the Narrative Strategy of *Beowulf*', in K. O'Brien O'Keefe and A. Orchard (ed.), *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vols (Toronto, 2005), I, 368–88 at 375–6, 379. For Norse instances, see Andersson, 'Thief', 506–7.

36 A prefiguring of Hroðgar's gazing on the severed hilt of the giant sword. That the severed arm was Grendel's right arm—normally the stronger and therefore the sword-arm—is revealed by Beowulf in 2098–9.

bad-sword’]. Each (man) said that no iron of hard men, good from days of old, would touch it, such that it would carry off/harm the monster’s bloody battle-hand.

This passage, although comprehensible, presents various obscurities that might indicate textual corruption.³⁷ Clearly, however, it characterizes the hand of Grendel—the giant who did not wield swords and who employed magic to prevent them injuring him—as a substitute weapon.³⁸ Furthermore, it seems to me that in *unheoru*, the climactic word of the first sentence, there is wordplay on **unheoru* ‘un-/bad-sword’.³⁹ The pun has been prepared for, as earlier the sword-less Grendel had left Heorot stained with *heorudreore* ‘sword-blood’ (487); the same word also describes the gore that gushed from Grendel’s body after losing his arm (849); and when gazing at Grendel’s severed arm, Hroðgar had recalled the time when Grendel had left Heorot *heorodreorig* ‘sword-bloody’ (935).⁴⁰ The fact that ON *hnefi* ‘fist’ is a poetic term for a sword, and ON *benknúar* ‘wound-knuckles’ and *blóðhnefi* ‘blood-fist’ denote a part or parts of a sword (perhaps one with a pommel resembling knuckles), offers encouragement for this interpretation,⁴¹ as do episodes in two Old Norse sagas.

First is *Hjálmþés saga* and the juxtaposed functional equivalence of a troll-woman’s iron-clawed arms and the hero’s sword, Snarvendill, in a stanza quoted in Chapter 7.

37 See *KB*, 175.

38 In Chapter 14 I relate Grendel’s arm and hand to an Old Norse wolfish troll’s pitchfork and a giant’s destructive boathook.

39 **Unheoru* ‘un-/bad-sword’ would be comparable in construction to *untydras* ‘bad brood/evil offspring’ (111), another hapax legomenon applicable to Grendel, who is also a creature of *unhælo* ‘unwholesomeness, evil’ (120). Cf., in Chapter 10, my proposal of similar wordplay on *heoru* ‘sword’ in *nis þæt heoru stow* ‘that is not a pleasant/sword place’ (1372). With Grendel’s nails as implicit sword-hooks, perhaps compare the *heorohocyhtum* ‘sword-hooked’ boar-spears used to capture one of the creatures in his mere (1438). For other interpretations of Grendel’s arm as a sword, see Damico, ‘*Drymskviða*’, 409, 426 n. 16. Later in the poem, Grendel’s mother is described as *unhyre* ‘unpleasant’ (2120) and the dragon as *unhiore* (2413).

40 Cf. Hroðgar’s description of Grendel’s head as *heorodreorigne* ‘sword-bloody’ (1780), after its severing by the giant sword. Note, too, how Wiglaf bathed *mid handa heorodreorigne* ‘with his hands the sword-bloody one [i.e., Beowulf]’ (2720) as the hero lay mortally wounded by the fire-dragon which breathed sword-like *hildeleoman* ‘battle-lights’ (2583) and which was killed by sword and knife.

41 *PTP*, 796, 798, 808–9; cf. also, perhaps, the threat by a Grendel-like giant called Hárekr to use his *hnefi* as a weapon in a saga-episode discussed in Chapter 14.

Second is the fourteenth-century *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* ‘Saga of Egill the One-Handed and Ásmundr, Slayer of Berserks’. Chapter 11 describes how a dwarf had forged a prosthetic sword to replace the severed hand of a man called Egill (from Götaland), which had been cut off in a fight with a giant.⁴² Earlier, in chapters 3 and 4, Egill, complete with prosthetic sword, shows similarities to Grendel when attacking Heorot and fighting Beowulf. Egill, we learn, was raiding the lands of King Hertryggr of Russia, and had killed some of his men. Before dying, one of Egill’s victims declared that no men could stand against the blows of his prosthetic sword. However, a Norwegian called *Ásmundr* ‘God-Hand’ (compare the divinely assisted and mighty-handed Beowulf) came over the sea and offered to defend the king. He fought Egill (the first element of whose name may be related to the first element of OE *aglæca/æglæca* ‘awe/terror-inspiring one’,⁴³ a term used more than once of Grendel). During the fight, Ásmundr threw away his sword, leapt at Egill and wrestled with him (compare Beowulf’s renouncing of a sword before wrestling with Grendel, and his subsequent discarding of Hrunting before wrestling with Grendel’s mother). Eventually he overthrew Egill. Ásmundr then went to retrieve his sword and kill Egill, but was so impressed that Egill simply lay calmly where he was that he spared his life. The two became sworn-brothers. Subsequently, in chapter 5, they met a briefly hostile giantess called *Skinnefja* ‘Skin-Nose’⁴⁴ and her mother *Arinnefja* ‘Eagle-Nose’. The latter is described as a *kerling* ‘old woman’, but as she ruled over *Jötunheimar* ‘Giant-Homes’ she was evidently also a giantess.⁴⁵ Later still, in chapter 14, Arinnefja reattaches Egill’s severed limb, which she had preserved⁴⁶ (compare Grendel’s mother’s seizure of his severed arm, although she is not said to have reattached it).

However we interpret *unheoru* in *Beowulf*, Grendel’s arm-weapon is apparently attached to the outside of Heorot’s intact roof, where it serves as a trophy and contrasts with the immediately following

42 FSN, III, 348.

43 The same word describes Beowulf, Sigemund and the dragon; see Lapidge, ‘*Beowulf* and the Psychology’, 380–1.

44 Cf. *Skinnhúfa* ‘Skin-Hood’ in *Hjálmþes saga*.

45 FSN, III, 327–34.

46 FSN, III, 354–5. In chapter 17, the dwarf Reginn makes a handle for the redundant prosthetic, which becomes a *góðr gripr* ‘good treasure’; *ibid.*, 362.

decoration of the hall's destroyed interior *folmum* 'with hands' (992).⁴⁷ Its suspension also prefigures that of the giant sword on the wall of Grendel's submerged hall—a weapon which, at its moment of triumph, is similarly characterized as an extension of Beowulf's arm. It may be suggested that rather as Beowulf's good giant sword (which Grendel may have wrongly seized with his un/bad-sword) becomes figuratively Beowulf's arm, so, inversely, Grendel's arm (which Beowulf rightly seized with his arm) becomes figuratively Grendel's un/bad-sword.

The Basis for Detecting Germanic Myth in *Beowulf*

We have already related one Norse myth about a thunder-god's loss and recovery of his hammer to the potential theft of the giant sword in *Beowulf*. In the following chapters in Part II I draw on other Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon nature-myths to provide comparative support for my proposal of a basis for the giant sword, its original owner, its theft by giants, and its recovery by Beowulf in antagonistic dealings between the sun and the moon and their representatives.⁴⁸ Many of these myths may well have heathen Germanic origins akin to those that, I believe, lie behind *Beowulf* and coexist with the giant sword's apparent roots in the Judaeo-Christian world of Cain and Abel and the Flood.

47 If Heorot were surmounted by antlers, Grendel's arm would also contrast with them (see Chapter 10).

48 Generally on deities of sun and moon and their myths, see M. R. Dexter, 'Proto-Indo-European Sun Maidens and Gods of the Moon', *Mankind Quarterly* 25 (1984), 137–44; M. Green, *The Sun-Gods of Ancient Europe* (London, 1991); M. R. Dexter, 'Dawn-Maid and Sun-Maid: Celestial Goddesses among the Proto-Indo-Europeans', in K. Jones-Bley and M. E. Huld (ed.), *The Indo-Europeanization of Northern Europe: Papers Presented at the International Conference held at the University of Vilnius, Vilnius, Lithuania September 1–7, 1994* (Washington, 1996), 228–46; B. B. Schmidt, 'Moon', in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (ed.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd edn. (Leiden, 1999), 585–93; Cashford, *Moon*; M. L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford, 2007), 194–237; and E. J. M. Witzel, *The Origin of the World's Mythologies* (Oxford, 2012), 139–48, a discussion of the widespread mythic idea that the sun disappeared, sometimes having been captured by a greedy demon, into a cave or other enclosure (sometimes surrounded by water), from which it was later released by a god or hero. For the chronological development of solar traditions in ancient Scandinavia, including the continuation of some 'faint echoes' into medieval Icelandic literature, see Andrén, *Tracing*, 117–66, 171. On concepts of the sun in Norse and Finnish myth, see T. A. Dubois, 'The Mythic Sun: An Areal Perspective', in P. Hermann, S. A. Mitchell, J. P. Schjødt (ed.), *Old Norse Mythology—Comparative Perspectives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2017), 191–222.

Such a basis in Germanic mythology would be in keeping with the following points:

- (a) The fantastic nature of the probably sun-like giant sword and its supernaturally strong Scandinavian wielder, *Beowulf*.
- (b) The interest of preceding texts in Cotton Vitellius A.xv in marvels relating to the sun and moon.
- (c) The giant sword's location in a Danish mere suggestive of the Lake of the Moon in *Wonders*.
- (d) The presentation of the giant sword's hilt to Hroðgar, a heathen Danish king, in a hall with likely solar associations.
- (e) The giant sword's use to slay Norse giants, which were sometimes associated, even identified, with the moon, and sometimes slain by the first rays of the sun.
- (f) The existence of many other parallels between *Beowulf* and Old Norse texts containing passages that probably either derive elements from, or were originally, nature-myths.
- (g) The ancient mythical background to *Beowulf*'s monster-fights identified by Joseph Fontenrose.⁴⁹
- (h) Lastly, but potentially most importantly, the possibility proposed by Bo Gräslund that much of *Beowulf*—its story, setting and personages—reflects a pagan poem of East Scandinavia in the late Migration Age.

More specifically, I draw comparisons between *Beowulf*'s fight with Grendel's mother and Old English and Old Norse myths about the theft (or unsanctioned possession) and concealment of sunlight by creatures associated with the moon, and that light's recovery by the sun or one or more solar emissaries. For example, in one Norse myth preserved in *Sólarljóð*, a thirteenth-century(?) Christian poem, we shall find such light symbolized as a comparable solar weapon—an antler, which, like *Beowulf*'s giant sword, may also symbolize the Cross. I shall also suggest that *Beowulf* might allude to such an antler-symbol immediately before the hero enters Grendel's mere and discovers the giant sword.

⁴⁹ Fontenrose, *Python*, Appendix 5 treats 'The Combat in Germanic Myth and Legend', with discussion of *Beowulf* on 525–34.

Although at least one eminent scholar has taken the view that the *Beowulf*-poet's 'knowledge of the pagan practices of his Germanic ancestors and/or their Scandinavian cousins was little more than a vague awareness of what was done "in those days"'⁵⁰—a proposal now contradicted by Gräslund—the Anglo-Saxon poet of a seventh-century or earlier *Beowulf* might be expected to have been familiar with heathen Anglo-Saxon myths, many of which, given a shared Germanic background, probably had much in common with Norse ones. He might also have known some Scandinavian myths. It has, at least, long been appreciated that artefacts from the seventh-century ship-burial in Mound One at Sutton Hoo show strong affinities with the art of Scandinavia and with objects described in *Beowulf*—even if, despite the close similarities, in Gräslund's view, 'Sutton Hoo-tid är inte Beowulftid'.⁵¹ Most famous among these is the impressive masked helmet, which may well represent the head of the Norse god Óðinn and/or his Old English cognate Woden.⁵² What is undeniable is that *Beowulf* takes a deep interest in, and knows much about, other aspects of the heathen Germanic past, including its legendary heroes. The poem's dragon-slaying hero *Sigemund*, for instance, reappears in the thirteenth-century Old Norse *Völsunga saga* 'Saga of the Völsungar' as *Sigmundur*, recipient of the sword of Óðinn.⁵³

If, as now seems unlikely, *Beowulf* were composed later, during the Viking Age, its poet might have learned of heathen Scandinavian myths from the many Norsemen who settled in England. Old Norse skaldic poems reportedly recited in pre-Conquest England mention Norse gods and goddesses—Freyr, Freyja, Óðinn and Høðr, among others—and assume knowledge of heathen Norse myths.⁵⁴ In addition,

50 C. E. Fell, 'Paganism in *Beowulf*: A Semantic Fairy-Tale', in T. Hofstra, L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (ed.), *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe: Proceedings of the Second Germania Latina Conference held at the University of Groningen May 1992* (Groningen, 1995), 9–34 at 28.

51 Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*, 234 ('Sutton Hoo-time is not *Beowulf*-time').

52 See N. Price and P. Mortimer, 'An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo', *European Journal of Archaeology* 17 (2014), 517–38.

53 R. G. Finch (ed. and trans.), *The Saga of the Volsungs* (London, 1965), 5.

54 See J. Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England', in J. Graham-Campbell *et al.*, *Vikings and the Danelaw*, 313–25 at 319–20. Notable is the kenning *sverð-Freyr* 'sword-Freyr' for 'warrior', first attested in the skaldic poem *Höfuðlausn* 'Head-Ransom', which, according to tradition, the Icelander Egill Skallagrímsson recited

surviving sculpture shows that Norse gods and myths were known in northern England during the Viking Age, and that they were adapted to Christian contexts.⁵⁵ The Cumbrian Gosforth Cross, from the first half of the tenth century, shows scenes from a version of Ragnarøk, the Norse apocalypse, in which the mythical figures of Óðinn, Víðarr, Loki, Sigyn and Heimdallr are identifiable from their corresponding appearances in Old Norse mythological texts. I examine this monument in detail in Chapter 10 as, despite most likely postdating *Beowulf*, it preserves relevant myths and provides an impressive example of the accommodation of heathen lunar and solar traditions within an image of the Christian Cross. The Gosforth ‘fishing-stone’ of similar date supplies further evidence by probably depicting the Old Norse myth of Þórr and the giant Hymir angling for the world-serpent; it may be a fragment of a Christian cross.⁵⁶ Moreover, there is reason to think that some of the surviving mythological Eddic poems, including *Drymskviða*, were composed or revised in England.⁵⁷ It seems likely that such poems were the means of transmission of heathen myths to the Gosforth carvers.

Therefore, despite the doubts of some scholars,⁵⁸ it would seem surprising if the *Beowulf*-poet was distinctly ignorant of stories involving heathen gods—even if, as a Christian, he would not repeat them openly or without modification. Evidence indicating that he probably was versed in such myths appears in episodes of *Beowulf* that recur in variant forms in Old Norse mythological texts, less obscurely than in the case of Grendel’s glove. In *Beowulf*’s account of the hero Hama’s taking of the *Brosinga mene* ‘torc of the Brosingas’ (1197–201), for example, we apparently have a story that was later told as an Old Norse myth about the seizure of the *Brisingamen* ‘torc of the Brisingar’ [‘Blazing/

in mid-tenth-century York; Sigurður Nordal (ed.), *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ÍF 2 (Reykjavík, 1933), 189.

55 See L. Kopár, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout, 2012); J. Jesch, ‘The Norse Gods in England and the Isle of Man’, in D. Anlezark (ed.), *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell* (Toronto, 2011), 11–24; McKinnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’, 328–30, 343–4.

56 Bailey and Cramp, *Corpus*, II, 108–9 and illustration 332.

57 See McKinnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’.

58 For discussion, see *HG*, x, 172; H. O’Donoghue, ‘What Has Baldr to Do with Lamech? The Lethal Shot of a Blind Man in Old Norse Myth and Jewish Exegetical Traditions’, *MÆ* 72 (2003), 82–107; and H. O’Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford, 2014), 16–17.

Shining Ones' = dwarves]' by the god Heimdallr.⁵⁹ Similarly, *Beowulf's* account of the Geat prince Hæðcyn's slaying of his brother Herebeald (2435–43) finds likely parallel—as noted by other commentators⁶⁰—in the Old Norse myth of Hǫðr's killing of his brother, the god Baldr: the Old English and Old Norse personal names are partly cognate.⁶¹ It is probably more likely that the *Beowulf*-poet has euhemerized such stories, or otherwise veiled their enactment by heathen divinities, for a Christian audience than that the authors of the Old Norse versions should have mythologized them so effectively.⁶²

However imprecise these findings may be, they ought to inspire some confidence that Old Norse mythology has the potential to inform our understanding of *Beowulf*. That is the case despite the many differences inevitably found in myths that relied for their survival chiefly on repeated reinvention through oral transmission, that therefore had no wholly fixed nature, and that took textual form at different times and in different places. For instance, whereas in *Beowulf* it is Sigemund who slays a dragon, in Old Norse literature this feat is attributed to Sigmundr's son, Sigurðr: there is agreement that a dragon was slain, but the role of dragon-slayer has been transferred between closely related male characters with similar names. As Heather O'Donoghue has recently observed: 'as long as we do not expect mythic material which precisely reproduces what has come down to us in Old Norse written sources, we may recognize echoes of Old Norse myth in several different forms in *Beowulf*.'⁶³

59 U. Dronke, 'Beowulf and Ragnarøk', *SBVS* 17 (1966–9), 302–25 at 323–5; *HG*, 196–8; H. Damico, 'Sörlapáttir and the Hama Episode in *Beowulf*', *SS* 55 (1983), 222–35. This is another possible instance of theft in *Beowulf*.

60 See *KB*, xlvii–xlviii.

61 Dronke, 'Beowulf', 322–3; *HG*, 198–202; O'Donoghue, 'Lethal Shot'. Dronke, 'Beowulf' also relates Beowulf's fight with the dragon to Þórr's combat against *Miðgarðsormr* 'Miðgarðr's Snake'; so too does Slade, '*Untydras ealle*', 30–1. For further thoughts on pagan aspects of *Beowulf*, see Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*, 82–106.

62 Cf. Dronke, 'Beowulf', 325: 'When early scholars traced the mythological parallels of *Beowulf*, they did not reckon with the mind of a poet well-versed in Christian apologetic techniques against the pagans, deliberately using, and diminishing the stature of, older myths for his Christian didactic purposes; an imaginative explorer who obliterated most of the tracks of his journey; an ingenious craftsman creating from strangely assorted stones of native tradition a mosaic of symbolic design.'

63 O'Donoghue, *English Poetry*, 17. For overviews of scholarship on myth and *Beowulf*, see R. W. Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction to the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge, 1963), 291–304; E. B. Irving, Jr.,

In pursuit of what is—to borrow a description applied to this type of investigation by the same scholar—a necessarily somewhat ‘speculative endeavour’,⁶⁴ in the next chapter I begin to lay the basis for my proposal that a myth involving solar weaponry associated with a Germanic god called *Ing* may underlie Beowulf’s recovery of the giant sword after beheading Grendel’s mother and Grendel. *Ing* seems essentially equivalent to the Scandinavian god *Ing(v)ilYngvi-Freyr*, whom we probably also met earlier in late, euhemerized form as *Ingi* in *Hjálmpés saga*.⁶⁵ In due course we shall find reason to connect this deity with both the giant sword and Hrunting.

‘Christian and Pagan Elements’, in Bjork and Niles, *Beowulf Handbook*, 175–92; J. D. Niles, ‘Myth and History’, *ibid.*, 213–32; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 98–129; *KB*, xxxvi–li.

64 O’Donoghue, *English Poetry*, 24. *KB*, I puts it more discouragingly: ‘Inquiry into the primitive mythological signification of those preternatural adventures is a daunting undertaking, resting as it must on conjecture and unprovable reconstructions.’

65 The equivalence of these figures was proposed as early as the nineteenth century. For a detailed modern discussion, see *HG*. General guides to Norse mythology include J. de Vries, *Altgermanisches Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1956–7); E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London, 1964); R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge, 1993); C. Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen* (London, 2011).

6. Ing, Ingvi-Freyr and Hroðgar

An obvious place to start an investigation into the possible Germanic mythical background of *Beowulf*'s giant sword and related matters is with the poem's most likely reference to a named heathen god or demigod, a certain Ing.¹ According to *Beowulf*, Ing—or at least this name—was intimately connected with the Danes, whose king, Hroðgar, received the giant sword's hilt from the poem's hero. This chapter examines what sources tell us about Ing, his likely Old Norse manifestation as Ingvi/Yngvi-Freyr, and his relationship to Hroðgar and the Danes of *Beowulf*.

The *Ingwine* 'Ing-Friends' and Ing, Son of Man

Ing takes no explicit part in *Beowulf*,² but his name appears in two of Hroðgar's grand titles: *eodor Ingwina* 'shelter of the Ing-friends' (1044) and *frea Ingwina* 'lord of the Ing-friends' (1319).³ One modern edition of *Beowulf* observes of *Ingwine*, a term for the Danes, that it 'bears weighty

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- 1 For prior discussions of Ing, see *HG*; Pollington, *Elder Gods*, 260–3; Dunn, *Christianization*, 60–1.
 - 2 For Ing's possible inspiration of the Scyld Scefing myth at the start of *Beowulf*, see C. Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode: Some Norse and Finnish Analogues', *Arv* 52 (1996), 7–48; *KB*, xlvi. According to another scholar, Scef 'is simply Ing by another name and *Scef-ing* may actually mean "Sheaf-bearing Ing" or "Sheaf-Son"' (Davis, *Beowulf and the Demise*, 115). Earlier, V. Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology: Gods and Goddesses of the Northland*, 3 vols (London, 1906), I, 135 equated Scef with Yngvi-Freyr.
 - 3 R. Jente, *Die mythologischen Ausdrücke im altenglischen Wortschatz: eine kulturgeschichtlich-etymologische Untersuchung* (Heidelberg, 1921), 93; *HG*, 61, 64–77 argues for further references to Ing(ui) in *Beowulf*, including in the Finnsburg-episode preceding Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother, and, later, a mention of his sword as *incge laf* 'Ingui's heirloom' (*incgelafe* 2577; see below). It is doubtful whether the aforementioned *Ingeld*, whom Alcuin considered had nothing to do with Christ, had anything to do with *Ing*; see *KB*, 470. The personal name *Ing* survives to this day, especially in Sweden, in male and female names such as *Inga*, *Inge*, *Ingmar* and *Ingrid*.

testimony to the ancient worship of Ing'.⁴ It adds that the word 'has the appearance of having been changed, by folk etymology, from (the equivalent of) **Ingvaeones* (the worshipers of Ing), the name by which Tacitus designates the Germanic North Sea ethnic groups ... If so, it may be supposed that from Jutland and Zealand, the cult of Ing spread to other Danish islands, to Skåne, and then to Sweden and perhaps A[n]glo-]S[axon] England.'⁵

The earliest extant information about Ing may be deduced from the *Germania* 'Germany' of Tacitus, the aforementioned first-century Roman historian.⁶ He tells us how Germanic people recorded in ancient songs that the earth-born god *Tuisto* 'Twin' had a son named *Mannus* 'Man', who was possibly also a god.⁷ Mannus, who was doubtless the progenitor of mankind, had at least three sons, after whom tribes of men were named, the first mentioned being the *Ingaevones* (**Ingvaeones*). If these details are a basically accurate record of early Germanic tradition, it appears that an early manifestation of Ing (suffixed **Ingwaz* in Primitive Germanic) was as a 'son of Man'.⁸ If this tradition passed down subsequent generations, it would encourage identification of Ing with Christ, a god-man who was similarly the 'Son of Man' (e.g., *Matthew* 8:20).⁹ I return to the potential Ing-Christ equation later.¹⁰ Additionally, an early association between *Ing* (or *Ingwin*) and divinity might be inferred from a damaged runic inscription on a third- or fourth-century golden neck-ring from the Pietroasa hoard (Romania), though its interpretation is controversial.¹¹

4 KB, lviii. Cognate is the Old Norse personal name *Yngvin*; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 34 n. 2.

5 KB, lviii n. 5.

6 H. W. Benario, *Tacitus: Germania: Germania* (Warminster, 1999), 14–5.

7 See Benario, *Tacitus: Germania*, 65.

8 Cf. Ingí's rule over *Mannheimar* 'Man-Homes/Worlds' in *Hjámpérs saga*.

9 If, as I strongly suspect, the superhuman Beowulf acts, from a Germanic perspective, on Ing's behalf, *Daniel* 7 may also supply a parallel. It describes the prophet Daniel's vision of four monsters that rise from the sea, the last a horned, iron-toothed beast of terrible strength which devoured and shattered (compare *Grendel* as 'grinder(?)'). This monster is killed, we infer, by one *quasi filius hominis* 'like a son of man' (compare Ing/Beowulf), who is presented to the enthroned white-haired *antiquus dierum* 'Ancient of Days' (compare hoary Hroðgar). For an interpretation of this vision which identifies the monster-slayer as the angel Michael, see J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, 1985), 151–77.

10 Cf. *HG*, 133, 150–2, 171, 267.

11 See P. Pieper, 'Autopsie und Experimente zur Runeninschrift auf den Goldreif von Pietroasa', in W. Heizmann and A. van Nahl (ed.), *Runica – Germanica – Mediaevalia* (Berlin, 2003), 595–646; *HG*, 140.

**Ingwaz* itself is a name of obscure origin.¹² However, Tacitus' genealogy encourages the suggestion that it originally meant 'man', as opposed to 'woman': compare Tocharian A *onk* and Tocharian B *enkwe*, which both mean '(mortal) man'. It might also be related to Latin *inguen* 'groin', 'private parts' and Greek *énkhos* 'spear'. An erect phallus is a likely characteristic of the Old Norse god Freyr, whom we meet next in close connection with Ing.

Ing and Ingvi-/Yngvi-Freyr

The 'man or god?' question which these admittedly meagre findings pose about **Ingwaz* extends to the interpretation of other Old English instances of *Ing*, since this name is not explicitly the name of a god or other supernatural personage, either in *Beowulf* or elsewhere. It also extends to the presumably cognate *Ing(v)i/Yngvi* of Old Norse tradition.¹³

Old Norse prose texts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are thought to euhemerize this figure as a humankind, explicitly or implicitly. Ari Þorgilsson's early twelfth-century *Íslendingabók* 'Book of Icelanders' places *Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr* 'Yngvi, king of Turks [i.e., Trojans]' at the head of the line of *Ynglingar* 'Descendants of Yng', followed by two clearly euhemerized deities in *Njörðr Sviakonungr* 'Njörðr, king of Swedes' and *Freyr* 'Lord'.¹⁴ The Latin *Historia Norwegie* 'History of Norway', composed in the second half of the twelfth century, records that *rex Ingui* 'king Ingui' was the first ruler of Sweden, according to the opinion of many, and, again, the father of *Neorth* [*Njörðr*], father of *Froy* [*Freyr*]; it adds that these last two were worshipped *ut deos* 'as gods' by their descendants.¹⁵ A Latin paraphrase of the lost twelfth-century *Skjöldunga saga* 'Saga of the Skjöldungar [= the *Scyldingas* of *Beowulf*]' identifies him as a brother of *Scioldus* [= ON *Skjöldr* = *Beowulf*'s *Scyld*]

12 See E. Polomé, 'The Names of the Runes', in A. Bammesberger (ed.), *Old English Runes and their Continental Background* (Heidelberg, 1991), 421–38 at 432–3; HG, 30; E. H. Antonsen, *A Concise Grammar of the Older Runic Inscriptions* (Tübingen, 1975), 49; Pollington, *Elder Gods*, 260; *ÍO* s.v. *Yngvi*; *ANEW* s.v. *Yngvi*.

13 See *AEW* s.v. *Ing*; *ANEW* s.v. *Yngvi*; *ÍO* s.v. *Yngvi*. The *y-* in *Yngvi-* results from *w*-mutation of *i-*, on which see E. V. Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd edn., ed. A. R. Taylor (Oxford, 1957), 273 (§42).

14 Jakob Benediktsson (ed.), *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók, ÍF* 1, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1968), I, 27.

15 I. Ekrem, L. B. Mortensen and P. Fisher (ed. and trans.), *Historia Norwegie* (Copenhagen, 2003), 74–5, 133–4, 195.

and a son of *Odinus* (ON *Óðinn*), to whom Sweden was assigned.¹⁶ The brothers *Skjöldr* and *Yngvi* also appear in the *Prologue* to Snorri's *Prose Edda*, where *Yngvi* is a Swedish king of Trojan descent as a son of *Óðinn*, who, together with his people, *þóttu líkari goðum en mönnum* 'seemed more like gods than men'.¹⁷ In Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* 'The Saga of the Ynglingar', the first saga in *Heimskringla* 'The Ring of the World', *Yngvi* is an alias of *Freyr* (*Freyr hét Yngvi öðru nafni* 'Freyr was called Yngvi by another name'), *Freyr* being *dróttinn yfir Svíum* 'lord over Sweden' and worshipped as a god.¹⁸

As well as being attested as a simplex, in which form it is also the name of later Scandinavian kings, the name appears as the first element of *Ing(v)i-/Yngvi-Freyr*.¹⁹ This compound represents a name or title of the god now best known as *Freyr*, this name being an elevation of the common Old Norse noun *freyr* 'lord'.²⁰ It seems likely, however, that originally the title *freyr* was appended to a suffixed form of *Ing*, to honour its bearer as the 'Ingvi-Lord' or 'Ingvi (the) Lord'.

It is questionable whether, for the *Beowulf*-poet, *Ing* was anything more than a name, part of two perhaps archaic and fossilized titles that he used purely for poetic effect or to observe time-honoured precedent. It is unsafe to assume that the poet knew any mythological traditions about *Ing* or that his poem has anything more to do with the figure behind this name. Therefore, some readers might take the view that research into this matter may start with *Hroðgar's* *Ing*-titles, but should also end with them. But without a full investigation, it is also unsafe to assume the inconsequentiality of the presence of *Ing* in *Hroðgar's*

16 *KB*, 304; Bruce, *Scyld and Scef*, 66–7.

17 *SnEGylf*, 5–6.

18 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 23–4.

19 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 4, 25; *SnESkald*, I, 113–4; Finnur Jónsson and Eiríkur Jónsson (ed.), *Hauksbók* (Copenhagen, 1892–6), 457 (also in *FSN* II, 148). Cf. *Ingunar-Freyr* (below).

20 O. Sundqvist, *Freyr's Offspring: Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society* (Uppsala, 2002), 161–2; *HG*, 25. General studies of *Freyr* include de Vries, *Altgermanisches Religionsgeschichte*, §§457–72; Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 165–75; L. Motz, *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer: A Study in Germanic Myth* (Wien, 1996), 11–32; A. G. Sheffield, *Frey: God of the World*, 2nd edn. ([n.p.] Lulu.com, 2007). His name appears in place-names in Norway and especially Sweden, and there is at least one instance from Denmark (Jutland); see S. Brink, 'How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?', in J. Quinn, K. Heslop and T. Wills (ed.), *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* (Turnhout, 2007), 105–36 at 109–11, 126–7, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.tcne-eb.3.4070>

grand titles to the wider meaning of *Beowulf*. I choose to attempt such an investigation: to pursue the possibility that for the *Beowulf*-poet, or at least some of the poem's sources, Ing and traditions associated with him and closely related figures were highly consequential.

From Hroðgar's Ing-titles it seems very likely that he and his people, as imagined in *Beowulf*, honoured Ing as a god or a semi-divine or other highly significant personage. Ing was perhaps their deified male ancestor or an anthropomorphized deity.²¹ It also follows from the term *Ingwine* that the Danes considered Ing their friend. This was the kind of relationship that Old Norse texts say some other men had with Freyr, the god probably identifiable wholly or partly with Ing.

Freyr, the Friendly God

Evidence for friendship between a single human—not a whole people—and Freyr survives in two or three Old Norse texts.

Stanza 24 of the Eddic poem *Sigurðarkviða in Skamma* 'The Short Lay of Sigurðr' describes the blood of the dead hero Sigurðr as that of *Freys vinar* 'Freyr's friend'.²²

Additionally, in the thirteenth-century *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða* 'Saga of Hrafnkell, Freyr's Priest', an Icelander calls Freyr *vin sínum* 'his friend'.²³

The idea that Freyr might befriend a man also seems implicit in the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Qgmundar þáttur dytts* 'Tale of Qgmundr Dint'. In this story a man called Gunnarr is warned that he is not altogether lucky because Freyr does not look on him *vinaraugum* 'with a friend's eyes'.²⁴

Worship of Ing in England?

Whether the Anglo-Saxons had friendly dealings with Ing, or even whether they worshipped him at all, is uncertain. This doubt is

21 For thoughts on the sometimes blurred distinction between humans and deities, see T. Ewing, *Gods and Worshippers in the Viking and Germanic World* (Stroud, 2008), 91–3.

22 See O. Gouchet, 'Sigurðr freys vinar', in T. Pàroli (ed.), *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Spoleto, 1990), 383–90. Another Eddic poem, *Reginismál* 'The Lay of Reginn', identifies Sigurðr as *Yngva konr* 'Yngvi's [i.e., Freyr's] offspring' (14).

23 Jón Jóhannesson (ed.), *Austfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 11 (Reykjavík, 1950), 100.

24 Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.), *Eyfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), 112.

unremarkable, though, given that we know so little about *any* individual heathen English god. Our sources of information are extremely scanty, but not wholly unrevealing. As we shall shortly see from a single surviving Old English stanza about Ing, at least some Anglo-Saxons, at one time or another, knew something of a remarkable personage of this name, whom they associated with Denmark in earlier days.

We also have instances of pre-Viking Age Anglo-Saxon personal names beginning in *Ing(i)-*, such as *Ingwulf*, *Ingibrand* and *Ingithryth*.²⁵ These might indicate continuing knowledge of, or respect for, Ing on the part of their bearers' parents, though this is not a safe assumption—they may just have been traditional names. In addition, an entry for the year 547 in the Parker manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* refers to a certain *Ingui* as ancestor of the mid-sixth-century King Ida of Bernicia.²⁶

In addition, place-names possibly supply indications of English affinity with Ing. *Ingham*, a toponym in Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk, could be the 'Ing-home', the homestead of the Ing-people, devotees of Ing. Similarly, *Ingworth* in Norfolk could be the 'Ing-enclosure'.²⁷

Ing in the *Old English Rune Poem*

Whereas in *Beowulf* Ing could well be the god or demigod of the Danes, in Old Norse texts, as we have seen, Yngvi(-Freyr) is linked principally with the Swedes, especially as progenitor of the *Ynglingar* 'Descendants of Yng(vi)'. But an enigmatic stanza from the *Old English Rune Poem*, known only from a transcript by George Hickes of a tenth-century

25 See W. G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum: A List of Anglo-Saxon Proper Names from the Time of Bede to that of King John* (Cambridge, 1897).

26 See HG, 42–3.

27 See V. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (Cambridge, 2004), 331–2. For further thoughts on Ing in Anglo-Saxon England, see HG. If *Ing* is equatable with *Ingvi/Yngvi-Freyr*, this links him to the tribe of Norse deities called *Vanir* (possibly related to ON *vinr* 'friend' or Latin *Venus*); Orton, 'Burning Bridges', 19–26 argues for traces of a 'cult of a god or gods of Vanir-type' at the court of Edwin of Northumbria, based on Bede's story of the king's conversion in 627 and the spearing of the heathen shrine at Goodmanham by the pagan priest Coifi. But for a very different interpretation, based on Christian exegesis, see J. Barrow, 'How Coifi Pierced Christ's Side: A Re-Examination of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, II, Chapter 13', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62 (2011), 693–706, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022046911001631>

manuscript which burnt in 1731, corroborates Ing's association with the Danes of earlier times. It also offers tantalizing clues to his nature:

ǣ [i.e., Ing] wæs ærest mid East-Denum
 gesewen secgun, oþ he siððan eft²⁸
 ofer wæg gewat— wæn æfterran;²⁹
 ðus Hearingas ðone hæle nemdun.³⁰ (67–70)

Ing was first seen by men [or 'with swords'] among the East-Danes, until he afterwards departed again [or *west* 'west?'] over wave [less likely 'over way/road']—he ran after a wain [or 'a wain ran after him']; thus the Hearingas³¹ named the hero.

Here Ing is ostensibly just a *hæle* 'hero' from the Danish past. But his initial sighting in the east—among the *East-Danes*³²—as if he were

28 Hicces' *est* may have confused the similar-looking Anglo-Saxon letters 'f' and long 's'. M. Halsall, *The Old English Rune Poem: A Critical Edition* (Toronto, 1981), 29, 147, however, retains *est* 'east' as a possible instance of late West Saxon monophthongization, though the same word has just been spelt *East* in *East-Denum*. An alternative, more euphonic emendation might be preferable, although it seems not to have been proposed before: *west* 'west(wards)'. This assumes a different transcriptional error, whether by an Anglo-Saxon scribe or George Hicces, one prompted by *-est* in *ærest* and, in the last line of the preceding stanza, *brimhengest*. Cf. the passage of vikings *west ofer Pantan* 'west over the (River) Pante' in *The Battle of Maldon* (97).

29 Or *æfter ran*, as published editions have it. I see a verb *æfterinnan* 'to run after', 'pursue', comparable to *æfterfolgian* 'to follow after', *æftergan* 'to follow after' and *æfteridan* 'to ride after'.

30 Adapted from Halsall, *Old English Rune Poem*, 90; cf. A. Bauer, *Runengedichte: Texte, Untersuchungen und Kommentare zur gesamten Überlieferung* (Vienna, 2003), 84. Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 264–8 takes *wæn* 'wain' as a personal name. See also on this verse, F. Klaber, 'Die Ing-Verse im angelsächsischen Runengedicht', *Archiv* 142 (1921), 250–3.

31 A heathen Germanic people whose name ostensibly means 'Descendants of the Hard One'. The name may originally have been that of the Vandalic tribe of (*H*) *asding(o)i*, and it is thought to reappear as *Haddingjar* in Old Norse texts, where it denotes two brothers. They may have originally been twin fertility gods, comparable to the Dioscuri of Greek and Roman myth. See also Pollington, *Elder Gods*, 261, who claims that the word's origins 'may lie in the word *heord* 'woman's hair' [seen in *Beowulf* 3151 *bundenheorde* 'with bound hair'] and probably relate to the Vanir priests with their effeminate adornments. If so, then the term must refer to the specifics of the Vanir cult, which fits neatly with Ing(ui) as a fertility god'; Tolley, '*Beowulf's* Scyld Scefing Episode', 19–20, who suggests that Ing is 'welcomed among, and perhaps served by, the Hearingas, in origin a "clan" of effeminate or transvestite priests dedicated to a fertility deity (or deities)'. For the solar associations of early Germanic fertility twins, see André, *Tracing*.

32 One of the titles of Hroðgar's people in *Beowulf* (392, 616, 828), though the poet also calls them North-, South- and West-Danes.

a phenomenon, together with his passage over the sea (probably), suggests rather a personified heavenly body or asterism, perhaps formerly a heathen sky-god.³³

Two such identifications have been advanced by scholars. I tentatively suggest that they may complement each other, one being Ing's nocturnal aspect, the other his diurnal. If so, the stanza is deliberately ambiguous, like others in the poem, and alludes to a fertility god's activities across a full twenty-four hours.

The nocturnal identification, made by Marijane Osborn, has Ing personifying the constellation Boötes,³⁴ which, she observes, resembles the Anglo-Saxon *Ing*-rune (ǰ).³⁵ Boötes, who was classically imagined as a ploughman, herdsman or huntsman, appears to follow Ursa Major (now commonly known in England as 'the Plough'), which is probably here the *wæn* 'wain, wagon'.³⁶ This interpretation is attractive, but open to question for two reasons. Firstly, this reading assumes *wæn æfterran* to mean 'he [Ing] ran after the wain', whereas grammatically it could just as easily mean 'the wain ran after [him/Ing]'. Other ambiguities in this stanza and the wider poem, however, warn against necessarily limiting interpretation to a single meaning.³⁷ Secondly, seeing the *Ing*-rune in this constellation assumes omission of the star now called Beta Boötis, which classically forms the head of the ploughman/hunter as the asterism's uppermost point and one of its brighter members.

If Ing was identified as Boötes, and as a ploughman, this would strengthen his similarity to Triptolemus, a Greek fertility figure who

33 Cf. M. Clunies Ross, 'The Anglo-Saxon and Norse *Rune Poems*: A Comparative Study', *ASE* 19 (1990), 23–39 at 36–7, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0263675100001587>: 'the Old English *Rune Poem* reveals a cultural pressure to euhemerize or remove some of its non-Christian subject matter, as in its treatment of the rune-names *Ing*, *Dorn* (probably) and *Tir*'.

34 Cf. the poem's earlier description of the rune ↑ (i.e., *Tir*; cf. OE *Tiw*, ON *Týr*, a heathen god) as a guiding star, planet (perhaps Mars) or constellation. Subjects of other stanzas include the sun and the day.

35 See M. Osborn, 'Old English Ing and his *Wain*', *NM* 81 (1980), 388–9.

36 Ursa Major is not elsewhere identified as Ing's wain. According to Ælfric, laymen called this constellation *Carles wæn* 'Carl's/Peasant's wain'; M. Blake (ed.), *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni* (Cambridge, 2009), 92–3, 125; cf. Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, 338–9; *EDD*, s.v. *wain* 2 (1) identifies it as the 'Wain-and-horses'. The sixteenth-century English poet Edmund Spenser described Boötes as 'the Northerne wagoner'; A. C. Hamilton (ed.), *Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene* (London, corr. rpt. 1980), 44 (1.2.1); D. Brooks-Davies, *The Mercurian Monarch: Magical Politics from Spenser to Pope* (Manchester, 1983), 29–30.

37 See below and P. Sorrell, 'Oaks, Ships, Riddles and the Old English *Rune Poem*', *ASE* 19 (1990), 103–16.

dispensed seed on the earth from a dragon-drawn chariot.³⁸ As we shall see later in relation to Beowulf's ursine attributes and sword, and to Cain's occupation as an *agricola* 'farmer, ploughman', it may also be of importance that:

- (a) Most people's first sight of Boötes would be in the east in March, when his arrival heralded the return of the sun's warmth and the start of the ploughing season. Boötes then remained visible throughout the summer, before disappearing to the west.
- (b) Boötes is closely associated with *Ursa Major* 'the Great Bear'.³⁹
- (c) *Arcturus*, the Latin name of Boötes' most prominent, golden star, or in some early sources of *Ursa Major*,⁴⁰ means 'Bear-Guardian'.⁴¹ Similarly, the Greek name for Boötes, *Arctophylax*, means 'Bear-Watcher/Guardian'.
- (d) Although Osborn emphasizes Ing's 'fiercer aspect' in the *Old English Rune Poem*,⁴² the Anglo-Saxons may well have considered Ing a ploughman. Despite the lack of explicit evidence for the concept of *Ursa Major* as a plough before the Middle English period,⁴³ it would make good sense of Ing's pursuit of a wain if he were imagined as a ploughman. The *wæn* 'wain' would then be a wheeled plough, such as the *wægn* 'wain' described in *Riddle 19 (ASPR, 21)* from the *Exeter Book*.⁴⁴ And if he were a ploughman, it would follow that Ing

38 Parallels between Ing and Triptolemus are noted by Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 42 n. 29.

39 Other bordering constellations, whose Latin names will catch the eye of readers familiar with the final third of *Beowulf*, include *Corona Borealis* 'the Northern Crown' (next to Boötes' head), *Draco* 'the Dragon', *Hercules* 'Hercules' (the classical strongman and demigod) and *Serpens* 'Serpent' (in modern times, at least, split into *Serpens Caput* 'Serpent Head' and *Serpens Cauda* 'Serpent Tail').

40 See R. H. Allen, *Star Names and their Meanings* (New York, 1899), 98–9, 101; Blake, *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*, 48–9.

41 Cf. the personal name *Beowulf*, often interpreted as 'Bee-Wolf', i.e., 'Bear'.

42 Osborn, 'Old English Ing', 388.

43 *MED* s.v. *plough* (n.), sense 5.

44 Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 80, 200. The following riddle in the collection probably describes *Ursa Major* as a *wægn*; see *ibid.*, 80–1, 201–4; P. J. Murphy, 'The Riders of the Celestial Wain in Exeter Book Riddle 22', *N&Q* 251 (2006), 401–7; D. Bitterli, *Say What I am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto, 2009), 60–65. For 'plough team (attached to a wheeled plough)' as a solution to another riddle in this collection, see S. F. Cochran,

was the wielder of at least one coulter, the sword-like cutting implement, potentially with a long wooden handle, which was fixed to the plough in order to pierce the formerly frozen soil.⁴⁵

The second possible identification of Ing in the *Old English Rune Poem* is as a sun-god or solar emissary who arrives in the spring (summer in the Anglo-Saxon two-season year) with a chariot and who stays until autumn (winter).⁴⁶ The sun is also seen first in the east, and appears to move west over land and sea before departing, as it were through a daily death, below the horizon.⁴⁷

The sun and sun-gods are often associated with animal-drawn vehicles, in which they cross the sky over land and sea,⁴⁸ although in Ing's case he would be leading the solar wain (which might make him, like Freyr, as we shall see, the controller of the sun).⁴⁹ Scandinavian and Icelandic evidence for such vehicles is quite plentiful. It includes

'The Plough's the Thing: A New Solution to Old English Riddle 4 of the Exeter Book', *JEGP* 108 (2009), 301–9, <https://doi.org/10.1353/egp.0.0054>

- 45 A recent archaeological discovery in Lyminge, Kent shows that the heavy plough with coulter was known in seventh-century England; see 'Anglo-Saxon 7th Century Plough Coulter Found in Kent' (7 April 2011), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-12997877> and '7th Century Plough Discovery Redraws Map of Rural England by 400 Years' (7 April 2011), <https://www.reading.ac.uk/news-and-events/releases/PR361415.aspx>. For a survey of evidence for Anglo-Saxon ploughs, see D. Banham, 'Race and Tillage: Scandinavian Influence on Anglo-Saxon Agriculture?', in M. Kilpiö, L. Kahlas-Tarkka, J. Roberts and O. Timofeeva (ed.), *Anglo-Saxons and the North: Essays Reflecting the Theme of the 10th Meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists in Helsinki, August 2001* (Tempe, 2009), 165–91 at 181–7.
- 46 See P. B. Taylor, *Sharing Story: Medieval Norse-English Literary Relationships* (New York, 1998), 102. Note also Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 17, according to whom 'Ing's journey probably represents that of the sun. ... The wain is most likely the Great Bear ... appearing in the darkness and moving above the earth as the sun, unseen moves beneath. The wain should thus be seen as the carriage of the sun, following after it' (a surprising interpretation of Ursa Major, given its extreme spatial and temporal separation from the sun). We shall find that Ing's likely Old Norse equivalent, Ingvi/Yngvi-Freyr, was a god of benign growing weather (sunshine and rain) and the harvest. Even if the sun is the subject of stanza 16 of the *Old English Rune Poem*, this need not preclude a solar aspect to Ing and his wain here.
- 47 For the observation that 'the word *gewat* ... works in two directions, "departed" and "died"', see F. G. Jones, Jr., 'The Old English *Rune Poem*, an Edition' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Florida, 1967), 63; also *ibid.*, 66 for the suggestion that the stanza alludes to Ing's funeral.
- 48 *MIFL*, motif A724 'Chariot of the sun'.
- 49 Cf. the pair leading the solar hart in *Sólarljóð* (see Chapter 13).

a Bronze Age model of a horse-drawn sun-chariot from Trundholm, Denmark (possibly c. 1400 BC);⁵⁰ and a record of what was probably another, roughly contemporary, sun-chariot from Tågaborg, Sweden.⁵¹ Later, in his *Germania* (chapter 45), Tacitus describes a belief in the far north, beyond the Suiones (Swedes), that the shapes of the sun's horses are seen at dawn, from which we might infer the presence of a horse-drawn vehicle.⁵² A solar chariot of some sort might also be inferred from the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* 'Sayings of Grímnir' (37), which records that two horses, *Árvakr* 'Early Waker' and *Alsviðr* 'All-Swift', *upp ... sól draga* 'drag up the sun'.⁵³ Another, probably later Eddic poem, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* 'Incantation of Óðinn's Ravens' (24), refers to a sun-chariot which recalls that of Phoebus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2.113).⁵⁴ Additionally, a solar chariot made by the gods is mentioned in *Gylfaginning*.⁵⁵

From late Anglo-Saxon England we have London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B V/1, a scientific miscellany which contains an illustration of *Sol*, a reddish, spiky-haloed male personification of the sun, driving a chariot drawn by four horses, above a pale female *Luna* 'Moon' holding twin torches and driving a chariot drawn by two horned bulls, one light, one dark.⁵⁶ And in a homily on the passion of the apostles Simon and Jude, Ælfric mentions two Persian idols of the

50 P. Gelling and H. E. Davidson, *The Chariot of the Sun and Other Rites and Symbols of the Northern Bronze Age* (London, 1969), frontispiece, 14–6; H. Meller (ed.), *Der geschmiedete Himmel: Die weite Welt im Herzen Europas vor 3600 Jahren* (Stuttgart, 2004), 54–7; Andrén, *Tracing*, 126–7.

51 Gelling and Davidson, *Chariot*, 16; Andrén, *Tracing*, 126, which also mentions another possible Swedish example.

52 Benario, *Tacitus: Germany*, 56–7; Andrén, *Tracing*, 150–1, 158. Solar horses also appear on early Celtic coins; see D. N. Briggs, 'Reading the Images on Iron Age Coins: 2. Horses of the Day and Night', *Chris Rudd List* 106 (2009), 2–4. Generally on this topic, see M. O. Howey, *The Horse in Magic and Myth* (London, 1923, rpt. Mineola, 2002), 114–25.

53 See also *SnEGylf*, 13–4; *SnESkáld*, I, 90; E. O. G. Turville-Petre, 'Fertility of Beast and Soil in Old Norse Literature', in E. C. Polomé (ed.), *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium* (Austin, 1969), 244–64 at 245–6. According to the Eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* 12, the horse *Skinfaxi* 'Shining Mane' draws day over mankind. Its counterpart *Hrímfaxi* 'Rime Mane' draws night over the gods in *Vafþrúðnismál* 14; *SnEGylf*, 13. *SnESkáld*, I, 90 adds *Fjorsvartnir* 'Life-Blackened' and *Glaðr* 'Glad' as horses that go with night and day, respectively. A horse called *Vegbjartr* 'Way/Road-Bright' might also be relevant; *PTP*, 937–8.

54 A. Lassen, (ed.), *Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Forspjallsljóð)* (London, 2011), 24, 93.

55 *SnEGylf*, 13.

56 London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B V/1, fol. 47r, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_tiberius_b_v11_f002r

sun and the moon which were accompanied by chariots: *Ða stod þære sunnan cræt mid feower horsum of golde agoten, on ane healfe þæs temples; on oðre healfe stod ðæs monan cræt of seolfre agoten, and ða oxan ðærto* 'There stood the chariot of the sun with four horses cast in gold, on one side of the temple; on the other side stood the chariot of the moon cast in silver, and the oxen belonging to it'.⁵⁷

Scholars have also proposed a kinship between Ing and his wain—as well as a wagon-drawn idol of Freyr in *Ögmundar þátr dytts*⁵⁸—and Tacitus' well-known description in *Germania* (chapter 40) of the goddess Nerthus and her wain.⁵⁹ The name *Nerthus* appears cognate with *Njörðr*, the name of Yngvi-Freyr's father in Norse mythology,⁶⁰ although some imaginative work is required to reconcile a first-century earth-goddess (if Tacitus is correct) with a medieval sea-god.⁶¹ Clive Tolley, for whom 'Ing's journey probably represents that of the sun', thinks Nerthus' visitation of her people similarly cyclic and suggests that it 'may again reflect the annual journey of the sun through the seasons',⁶² though Tacitus' account lacks explicit solar imagery.

Returning to the Ing-stanza in the *Old English Rune Poem*, the ambiguity of *secgun* 'by men/with swords' is noteworthy.⁶³ It finds parallel in the ambiguity of *secg* 'man/sword' in *Beowulf* (1569), which occurs at the moment the giant sword beheads Grendel's mother and *se leoma* 'the light' shines. A solar interpretation is also admissible for the present poem's *secgun*. Ing's 'swords' may be sunbeams, piercing shafts of light with which he rises from the sea, rather as Beowulf emerges from the mere holding both Hrunting and the giant sword's hilt. In the next chapter we shall encounter Skírnir—an Old Norse solar character, effectively an aspect of (Ingvi/Yngvi-)Freyr—who wields two swords that also appear comparable to Hrunting and the giant sword.

The case for purposeful ambiguity in *secgun* is strengthened by a preceding stanza in the *Old English Rune Poem* (15):

57 B. Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2 vols (London, 1844–6), II, 494.

58 See I. Wyatt and J. Cook, *Two Tales of Icelanders: Ögmundar þátr dytts og Gunnars helmings, Ólkofra þátr* (Durham, 1993), xviii–xx.

59 Benario, *Tacitus: Germania*, 52–3.

60 ANEW s.v. *Njörðr*; ÍO s.v. *Njörður*, *Njörðr*.

61 See HG, with discussion of the Ing-stanza on 44–8.

62 Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 17. For another interpretation of Freyr and his wagon in relation to the seasonal progress of Nerthus, see HG, 24–5.

63 The *-un* represents the dative plural inflexional ending more familiarly spelt *-um*.

ʝ [i.e., *eolhx*]-*secg* eard hæfþ oftust on fenne,
 wexeð on wature; wundap grimme,
 blode breneð beorna gehwylcne
 ðe him ænigne onfeng gedeð.

Elk/stag(?)⁶⁴-*sedg* [or ‘-sword’, ‘-man’] most often has a home in a fen; it/he grows in water, wounds fiercely, with blood browns every warrior who seizes it/him.

The subject of this stanza, *eolh(x)secg* ‘elk/stag(?)-sedg’ is probably identifiable as *Cladium mariscus*,⁶⁵ now often called great fen-sedge or saw-sedge. This plant, which commonly grows in English fens, where it can exceed eight feet in height, has hard, serrated leaves and an inflorescence resembling the Anglo-Saxon *Eolhx*-rune (ʝ). But the ambiguity of *secg*,⁶⁶ together with the stanza’s heroic imagery, enrich the poem’s description of this plant with martial connotations. As a fiercely wounding ‘elk/stag(?)’-sword’, *eolh(x)secg* suggests an extraordinarily sharp sword (or antler) associated with a stag,⁶⁷ one found in the waters of a fen.⁶⁸ This is a highly specific and peculiar combination, which we may find paralleled in the giant sword of *Beowulf*. Furthermore, if *breneð* puns on *berneð* ‘burns’, the elk/stag-sword even has a heat compatible with the giant sword’s likely solar nature and the concept of the solar stag (discussed in Chapter 10). Nor does the stanza’s suggestiveness end there, at least for an audience familiar with *Beowulf*. For, as ‘elk/stag-man’, *eolh(x)secg* also suggests a giant horned man who lives in the waters of a fen, who wounds fiercely, and who bloodies warriors with whom he comes in contact,⁶⁹ perhaps even burns them with his blood.

64 The meaning and etymology of *eolhx* are uncertain; see DOE s.v. *eolhx* and P. Bierbaumer, *Der botanische Wortschatz des Altenglischen*, 3 vols (Frankfurt, 1975–9), III, s.v. *eolhsecg*.

65 See M. Kilker, ‘The Rune Poem and the Anglo-Saxon Ecosphere: Identifying the *Eolh-Secg* in Man and Plant’, *JEGP* 116 (2017), 310–29.

66 Note also *garsecg* ‘ocean’, perhaps literally ‘spear-man’, in the poem’s twenty-fifth stanza.

67 Cf. Halsall, *Old English Rune Poem*, 133 for comparison with Latin *gladius* ‘sword’ and the plant-name *gladiolus*, literally ‘little sword’.

68 For another potential link between this poem and a sword, see Brunning, ‘“Living” Sword’, I, 140 (also Brunning, *Sword*, 75–6), which relates the presence of a single *æsc* ‘ash’-rune on an Anglo-Saxon pommel from King’s Field, Faversham, Kent to the poem’s description of an ash-tree remaining strong on its base when attacked by men.

69 Cf. the extremely sharp *þ* (i.e., *þorn* ‘thorn’) of the poem’s third stanza, which, rather similarly, is *anfengys yfyl*, *ungemetun reþe* ‘evil of grasping, immeasurably fierce’ to

This similarly peculiar combination is suggestive of Grendel, who in due course I show may well have been imagined as horned,⁷⁰ and who, as a likely sun-stealing lunar being and a descendant of Cain, may even be tentatively identified with a stag.⁷¹

To return to Ing, then, in both respects he appears associated in the *Old English Rune Poem* with heavenly brilliance and, directly or indirectly, with the return of the sun in springtime. It is attractive, if speculative, to imagine him ploughing his fields—and implicitly sowing his seed—as Boötes the Ploughman by night, before growing his crops as the leader of the sun by day. Broadly comparably, in Old Norse tradition Ing's likely counterpart Freyr is both the sun's controller and the god of the earth's produce (see Chapter 9). It is also noteworthy that, in *Ǫgmundar þáttr dytts*, an idol of Freyr is drawn *í vagni* 'in a wain' in Sweden, a vehicle whose arrival coincides with the return of mild weather.⁷²

The Inge-Peoples and the Sun-God of *Psalm 112*

Another, ostensibly unlikely, Old English source may upon close inspection also be found to preserve possible evidence of a traditional link between Ing and solar radiance. The first ten verses of *Psalm 112* of the *Paris Psalter*, a work of uncertain date, read:

Herigean nu cnihtas hælynd drihten,
and naman dryhtnes neode herigan.
Wese nama dryhtnes neode gebletsad
of ðyssan forð awa to worulde.
Fram upgange æryst sunnan
oðbæt heo wende on westrodur

any man who rests with it. This rune's name was probably originally *þurs* 'giant', a term used of Grendel in *Beowulf*. He was an evil, fiercely grasping monster, especially to those he found resting.

70 Cf. the aurochs of the poem's second stanza, which as an *oferhyrned, felafrecne deor* 'over-horned, very dangerous wild beast', a *modig wuht* 'bold creature' and especially a *mære morstapa* 'famous moor-stepper', also calls to mind Grendel.

71 The subject of the poem's next stanza is arguably *sigel* 'the sun (imagined as a brooch?)' shining above the world's waters (the stanzas for the S-rune in the *Norwegian Rune Poem* and *Icelandic Rune Poem* describe the sun), though a case for *segl* 'sail' is made by P. Nicholson, 'The Old English Rune for S', *JEGP* 81 (1982), 313–9.

72 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eyfirðinga sögur*, 113–4.

ge sculon dryhtnes naman dædum herigean.
 He is ofer ealle ingeþeode
 se heahsta hæleða cynnes,
 is ofer heofenas eac ahafen his wuldur.⁷³

Praise now, servants/warriors, the Saviour Lord, and praise the name of the Lord zealously. Let the name of the Lord be blessed zealously from this time forth, forever and ever. From the first rising of the sun until it turns to the western sky, you must praise the Lord's name with deeds. He is over all *inge*-peoples the highest of the race of heroes; his brilliance is also raised up over the heavens.

Here the Judaeo-Christian Lord's brilliance is implicitly identified with that of the sun, which *æryst* 'first' rises (compare the Danes' *ærest* 'first' sight of Ing in the *Old English Rune Poem*) and then passes into the *westrodur* 'western sky' (compare the emendation [*w*]est for *est* in the *Rune Poem*). In addition, the Lord is the highest of the race of *hæleða* 'heroes' (compare Ing as *hæle* in the *Rune Poem*).

It also appears significant that a poem which emphasizes the need to praise the Lord's name should identify his peoples as *ingeþeode* 'inge-peoples'. The exact meaning of this word, which probably also appears in the Old English poem *Exodus* (MS *incaþeode* 444), is disputed,⁷⁴ as here it does not seem to be a literal translation of the Latin's *omnes gentes* 'all peoples'.⁷⁵ The text's most recent editor interprets it as *in-geþeode* 'nations of humankind', without comment.⁷⁶ I suggest, however, that this instance of *inge-* may represent or allude to *Inge-/Ingi-*, a suffixed form of *Ing* attested in Old English personal names like *Ingibeald*, *Ingibrand* and *Ingimund*, and cognate with ON *Inge-* in *Inge-Freyr*.⁷⁷ If I

73 *ASPR* 5, 96.

74 Lucas, *Exodus*, 131 emends *ingedeode*, interpreted as 'native peoples'; cf. 142 *ingefolca* 'of native peoples', 190 *ingemen* 'native warriors'. *HG*, 62–4, however, translates *inge-* as 'Ingui' in each case. Not all these instances of *inge-* need necessarily mean the same thing, or even be the same word.

75 C. Williamson (trans.), *The Complete Old English Poems* (Philadelphia, 2017), 798 does, however, translate it as 'all nations'.

76 P. P. O'Neill (ed. and trans.), *Old English Psalms* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2016), 456–7.

77 See also my discussion of OE *incgelafe* below. For Old English names in *Ingi-*, see Searle, *Onomasticon*, 317. For ON *inge freys*, genitive singular of *Ingi-Freyr*, in a late-ninth-century reference to all living beings as *attir inge freys* 'families of Ingi-Freyr', see Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (Copenhagen, 1912–5, rpt. 1967), AI, 18; this form of the god's name is generally emended without

am right, the psalm implicitly links the progenitor-lord Ing(i), through his peoples and perhaps via subordination, with the Judaeo-Christian Lord. And it does so at the very point at which the Lord's brilliance is most sun-like.

Hroðgar and Danish Worship of an Unnamed Devil

Returning to *Beowulf*, we find that, if Hroðgar was an Ing-worshipper, the *Beowulf*-poet does not say so explicitly. As noted earlier, a historical Hroðgar would have been a heathen, but the poet is careful not to identify his Hroðgar as a devil-worshipper. Instead, the king of the Danes appears as a virtuous monotheist suggestive of an Old Testament patriarch.

We also saw, however, that in the face of Grendel's attacks many of Hroðgar's people resorted to *hæþenra hyht* 'the hope of heathens' by promising *æt hærgtrafum wigworþunga* 'idol(?)-honour at heathen centres' (175–6) and offering prayers to the *gastbona* 'soul/demon-slayer' (177). The *gastbona* is anonymous (Grendel? Ing?), and this passage describing Danish paganism is undoubtedly vague—Christine Fell stated that it 'shows absolutely no knowledge of the nature of such paganism'.⁷⁸ But if *wig-* in *wigworþunga* is interpreted as 'idol', the associated soul-slayer may have had at least something in common with Ing/Yngvi-Freyr:⁷⁹ Swedish idols of Frikko, a priapic deity identified by modern scholars with Freyr,⁸⁰ are mentioned by Adam of Bremen in his eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* 'History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen' (4.9, 4.26).⁸¹ Also, a Swedish idol of Freyr features in *Ǫgmundar þáttur dytts* (discussed below).

It is noteworthy that the *Beowulf*-poet identifies no heathen god by name in this passage. This might be due to ignorance, but his wealth of knowledge about other aspects of early Scandinavia, the multitude of personal names he mentions, and his surely deliberate omission

comment to *Ingvi-Freys*, as in R. North (ed.), *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir* (Enfield Lock, 1997), 6–7, 43–5. Cf. *HG*, 42, 60–64.

78 Fell, 'Paganism', 21.

79 Cf. *HG*, 180.

80 E.g., *HG*, 30.

81 B. Schmeidler (ed.), *Adam von Bremen, Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 3rd edn. (Hannover, 1917), 237, 258.

elsewhere of the name of Christ suggest otherwise. It may rather be that he felt the need to make his Christian credentials clear early in the poem by condemning heathenism in general terms, but was sensitive to specific religious and cultural affiliations. The heathen god's anonymity here might also have been necessary to enable subsequent use of his name in the respectful context of Hroðgar's grand *Ing*-titles. The poet may have sincerely maintained both an openly condemnatory stance toward demonic Germanic paganism and a quiet sympathy for other aspects of the old ways and towards his heathen forebears, as would be natural for many converts to Christianity and their offspring.⁸² This would be a welcome and pragmatic stance for a Christian poet to adopt if he were composing for an audience that included present or former devotees of *Ing*, or of men who maintained allegiance to both Christ and *Ing* at the same time.⁸³

Hroðgar, Healfdene's 'Firebrand' and the *Incgelaf*

The first of Hroðgar's *Ing*-titles, *eodor Ingwina*, occurs at the climax of a significant moment in *Beowulf*, one suggestive for investigators into the natures of the giant sword and Hrunting. It occurs when the Danish king bestows treasures on Beowulf in Heorot as a reward for slaying Grendel. The first of these is probably the sword of Healfdene, son of Beow and father of Hroðgar. It is introduced as a *brand*, literally a 'firebrand' (1020),⁸⁴ and its magnificence is emphasized:

Forgeaf þa Beowulfe brand Healfdenes,
segen gyldenne sigores to leane,

82 *HG*, 2, however, states that the *Beowulf*-poet 'identified Ingvi or Ing with the devil'.

83 According to Bede, King Rædwald, seventh-century king of East Anglia, maintained two altars in the same temple, one for Christian sacrifice, and a smaller one for sacrifices to devils (i.e., heathen gods); Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, 190–1.

84 The word also means 'fire, flame'. For OE *brand* as a word for 'sword', see M. L. Keller, *The Anglo-Saxon Weapon Names Treated Archaeologically and Etymologically* (Heidelberg, 1906), 159–60; *DOE* s.v. *brand* (4). On this specific instance, which editors have often emended away, see *KB*, 177–8. There is a possibility that the present instance is a proper noun; cf. *Tizón* 'Firebrand' (from Latin *titio*, accusative *titionem*), the name of a sword in a medieval Spanish epic, *El Poema de Mio Cid* 'The Poem of My Cid'. The golden pommels and crossguards of *Tizón* and another sword dazzled their beholders; see R. Hamilton and J. Perry (trans.), *The Poem of the Cid* (London, 1984), 186–7 (lines 3175–9).

hroden hildecumbor, helm ond byrnan;
 mære maðþumsweord manige gesawon
 beforan beorn beran. (1020–4)

He [i.e., Hroðgar] then gave to Beowulf a/the *brand* of Healfdene,⁸⁵ (and) a golden standard, as a reward for victory, an ornamented battle-banner [i.e., the standard], a helmet and a mailcoat; many saw the glorious treasure-sword borne before the warrior [i.e., Beowulf].

The poet goes on to describe the helmet's protective crown and the entrance of eight steeds,⁸⁶ one equipped with Hroðgar's war-saddle. He concludes:

Ond ða Beowulfe bega gehwæpres
 eodor Ingwina onweald geteah,
 wicga ond wæpna; het hine wel brucan. (1043–5)

And then the shelter of the Ingwine [i.e., Hroðgar] conferred on Beowulf possession of both, of horses and of weapons; he commanded him to use them well.⁸⁷

Here Hroðgar's designation as *eodor Ingwina* 'shelter of the Ing-friends' identifies him with his location, namely the hall Heorot whose name alliterates with his and which, we shall find, may encapsulate a key element of Yngvi-Freyr's mythology.⁸⁸ In a sense, therefore, it is also Heorot, 'the house of Ing', that presents Beowulf with the ancestral Danish 'firebrand', which is thereby also associated with Ing.⁸⁹

85 Alternatively, perhaps *brand Healfdenes* is a kenning for Hroðgar; see *KB*, 177, *DOE* s.v. *brand* (4).

86 Horses are associated with Freyr in Old Norse mythology, but not exclusively so.

87 Before diving into the mere, Beowulf requests that Hroðgar send the treasures to Hygelac, should he not return (1482–7). He later presents them to Hygelac himself, with less emphasis given to the *guðsweord geatolic* 'richly equipped (with a likely repeated pun on 'Geat-ly') battle-sword' (2154) than to the mail-coat.

88 Note also Hroðgar's earlier designation as *eodur Scyldinga* 'shelter of the Scyldingas' as goes *ut of healle* 'out from the hall' (663). D. Cronan, 'Poetic Words', 32–3 states that the use of *eodor* to mean 'lord' or 'king' was 'inherited from the earlier Germanic period' and that its presence is an 'indication of ... conservatism'. Cf. Hroðgar's later description of Grendel, who repeatedly entered Heorot, as *min ingenga* 'my in-goer/invader' (1776).

89 A personal name *Ingibrand* appears, possibly as a modification of *Ingui*, in an Anglo-Saxon list of the kings of Bernicia; see D. N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50 at 30; *HG*, 42 n. 67, 43.

This observation is especially interesting because Hroðgar's bestowal of Healfdene's sword on Beowulf prefigures Beowulf's reciprocal presentation of the giant sword—or rather its hilt—to Hroðgar. This instance of juxtaposition, like so many others in the poem, invites comparison and association. To some extent, at least, Healfdene's 'firebrand' and the burning, sun-like giant sword mirror each other.

No less intriguing is the possibility that Healfdene's 'brand', here unnamed, might be identifiable as *Nægling*, the fine old sword that later fails Beowulf when striking the dragon, and which appears to be described in the dative singular as an (or the) *incgelafe* (2577). The precise meaning of this unique word is much disputed—one modern edition of the poem deems it 'a desperate case'⁹⁰—but it warrants examination in context here because of its potential importance.

The passage in which *incgelafe* occurs reads:

Hond up abræd
 Geata dryhten, gryrefahne sloh
 incgelafe, þæt sio ecg gewac
 brun on bane, bat unswiðor
 þonne his ðiodcýning þearfe hæfde,
 bysigum gebæded. Þa wæs beorges weard
 æfter heaðuswenge on hreoum mode,
 wearp wælfyre; wide sprungon
 hildeleoman. Hreðsigora ne gealp
 goldwine Geata; guðbill geswac,
 nacod æt niðe, swa hyt no sceolde,
 iren ærgod. (2575–86)

He [i.e., Beowulf] raised his hand swiftly, the lord of the Geatas, struck the terrible-coloured/shining one [i.e., the dragon] *incgelafe*, so that the brown edge⁹¹ gave way on the bone, bit less strongly than its people-king had need of, oppressed by afflictions. Then the barrow's warden [i.e., the dragon] was, after the battle-stroke, in savage mood, cast slaughter-fire; battle-lights sprang widely.⁹² The gold-friend of the Geatas [i.e., Beowulf] did not boast of

90 *KB*, 251.

91 On this term, see W. S. Walker, 'The *Brūnecg* Sword', *MLN* 67 (1952), 516–20.

92 The wording admits secondary images of the dragon breathing fiery swords in response to Beowulf's sword-stroke, and of swords 'springing apart'. Cf. Vargeisa's production of the radiant sword *Snarvendill* from her mouth (see Chapter 3).

triumphant victories; the war-bill failed, naked in the hostility, as it should not have, the formerly good iron [or 'iron good from days of old'].

Wiglaf then came to Beowulf's aid, wielding a *gomel swyrd* 'old sword' (2610), *Eanmundes laf* 'Eanmund's leaving/heirloom' (2611), an *ealdsweord etonisc* 'giantish old-sword' (2616):

Ne gemealt him se modsefa, ne his mæges laf
gewac æt wige; þæt se wyrm onfand,
syððan hie togædre gegan hæfdon. (2628–30)

The heart did not melt in him, nor did his kinsman's heirloom give way in battle; the worm [i.e., dragon] found that out when they had come together.

Wiglaf urged Beowulf to hold true to what he had said in his youth, namely that he would never allow his reputation to weaken (*gedreosan*, 2666) as long as he lived. The dragon then attacked again:

Pa gen guðcýning
mod gemunde, mægenstrengo sloh
hildebille, þæt hyt on heafolan stod,
niþe genyded; Nægling forbærst,
geswac æt sæcce sweord Biowulfes,
gomol ond grægmæl. Him þæt gifeðe ne wæs
þæt him irenna ecge mihton
helpan æt hilde; wæs sio hond to strong,
se ðe meca gehwane, mine gefræge,
swenge ofersohte, þonne he to sæcce bær
wæpen wundrum heard; næs him wihte ðe sel. (2677–87)

Then the war-king [i.e., Beowulf] again remembered his courage, struck with main-strength with battle-bill, so that it stood in the head, impelled by violence; Nægling burst apart,⁹³ Beowulf's sword failed in battle, old and grey-marked. It was not granted to him that the edges of irons could help him in battle; the hand was too strong, that which, as I have heard tell, overtaxed every blade in the stroke, when he bore to battle a wonderfully hard weapon; it was not at all the better for him.

93 For a different interpretation of this passage, see below.

These passages resonate with echoes of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother.⁹⁴ Few listeners could fail to recall, for example, the stroke of the *hildebil* Hrunting rebounding off her head, or Beowulf's subsequent use of a giantish sword, a greater *hildebil*, whose blade was then destroyed by its monstrous foe(s) (albeit very differently). The thoughts of many would be drawn especially to the latter weapon, the giant sword, as they would identify the present reportage as factually questionable—at least one sword *had* been strong enough for Beowulf's hand, even if, strictly speaking, he had not brought it to battle but rather discovered it in the nick of time in the giants' lair.⁹⁵ The *ealdsweord etonisc* 'giantish old-sword' (2616), *fah ond fæted* 'shining and ornamented' (2701), with which Wiglaf pierced the dragon also echoes the shining, ornamented giant sword, the *ealdsweord eotenisc* (1558).

Such echoes are significant for the interpretation of *incgelafe* because they encourage association with the preceding swords of the Danes, of the 'friends of Ing'. Although the form *incgelafe* appears nowhere else, *-lafe* is readily identifiable as the dative singular of *laf* 'leaving/heirloom' (a word seen in *Wiglaf* and elsewhere as a simplex in the quoted passages). The problem is *incge-*. It is even undecided whether it is the first part of a compound noun *incgelafe*,⁹⁶ or the first of two separate words.

Possibly the meaning of *incgelafe* is 'with the native-heirloom' or 'with the in-heirloom' (i.e., the 'heirloom treasured within, or as an integral part of, a dynasty'); in either case it would presumably have been an heirloom of the Geatas.⁹⁷ Another suggestion is 'with the burning/shining heirloom'.⁹⁸ Many other explanations and emendations have been offered, most of which will not be discussed here.⁹⁹ Instead, I focus on those that concern Ing.

94 See further Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 62–92. On Nægling's failure, see also Garbáty, 'Fallible Sword' and M. C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, 2004), 74–7.

95 Note, too, the comparable sword Beowulf used in the Breca-episode, though it may well be a 'double' of the giant sword. Cf. Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 178–80.

96 As presented in *KB*. I discount **inc-gelafe* '(with the) Inc [= Ing?] heirloom', as there is no otherwise attested OE *gelaf* 'leaving, heirloom'.

97 As noted by W. Cooke, 'Three Notes on Swords in *Beowulf*', *MÆ* 72 (2003), 302–7 at 306.

98 R. D. Fulk, 'Old English *icge* and *incge*', *ES* 59 (1978), 255–6 (not mentioned in *KB*).

99 See *KB*, 88, 251; *DOE* s.v. ? *icge*; ? *incge-laf*.

The emendations *In(c)ges*, *Ingwina* and *Ingwines* for *incge-* in *incgelafe* identify Beowulf's sword as, respectively, that of Ing, the Ing-Friends and the Ing-Friend (Hroðgar or one of his ancestors), but the last two at least are too far removed from the manuscript reading to persuade. Thinking along the same lines, Richard North asserts that *incge lafe* means 'Ingui's sword', and that this is 'evidence that the poet knew of Ingui's sword, comparable to the sword which Freyr gives to his servant Skírnir'.¹⁰⁰ He makes no more of the point than that, however.¹⁰¹

Despite their shortcomings, these suggestions may well be thinking along the right lines. For *incgelafe* is, in my view, interpretable without emendation as *Incgelafe* 'with the In(c)ge-leaving/heirloom';¹⁰² or perhaps, if the original meaning of *Incge-* had faded and been generalized, as *incgelafe* 'with the divine leaving/heirloom' or 'with the supernaturally immense/mysterious/sublime leaving/heirloom'.¹⁰³ *Incge-* would then be a variant spelling of *Inge-* (the latter seen in the proposed *ingeþeode* of *Psalm 112* in the *Paris Psalter*).¹⁰⁴ In this light, the obscure history of Nægling merits investigation.

100 HG, 75.

101 Nor does he explain how the male personage Ing(ui) could be denoted by a genitive singular form ending in *-e* (grammatically feminine).

102 As also in Kiernan, *Electronic Beowulf*. Cf. the Old English male personal names *Frealaf* 'Frea-Leaving' and *Oslaf* 'God-Leaving'. A sword dredged from the River Lark has three boars stamped or punched into its blade, two on one side and one on the other; if these are not just maker's marks, it might be suggested that they associate this sword with the power of the boar and of Ing. However, whereas this weapon was formerly dated to the seventh century, it is now thought to be pre-Anglo-Saxon; see T. C. Lethbridge and M. M. O'Reilly, 'Archaeological Notes', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 32 (1932), 59–66 at 64–5 and pl. VI, VII; *SASE*, 49–50, fig. 21; *SASE5-7*, 324–5. Whether the obscure maker's name(?) *Ingelrii* found on some Viking Age swords has any connection with Ing is unknown; for instances, see Peirce, *Swords*, index under 'inscriptions, Ingelrii'; Lang and Ager, 'Radiographic Study', 101–4.

103 See C. Ball, '*Incge Beow. 2577*', *Anglia* 78 (1960), 403–10, <https://doi.org/10.1515/angl.1960.1960.78.403>; Jack, *Beowulf*, 93–4 (n. to 1107), 177 (n. to 2577). For a very different interpretation of *incgelafe*, see J. F. Vickrey, *Beowulf and the Illusion of History* (Cranbury, 2009), chapters 10 to 12, who interprets it as '(with) the in-leaving/in-sword', the sword Nægling having, he argues, been kept *in* the cave of the supposed monster Dæghrefn, from whose nail or talon it was supposedly made. I think this implausible, as does J. R. Hall in his review of Vickrey's book in *JEGP* 111 (2012), 401–3.

104 For *Incge-* as a spelling variant of *Inge-*, see Searle, *Onomasticon*, 315. Cf. *[n]cgegold* 'Ingi-/immense(?) -gold' (*Beowulf* 1107). Note that *Beowulf's* *Ingwina* and *incgelafe* were written by different scribes.

It is uncertain whether Beowulf acquired Nægling before or after Hygelac's death, which apparently occurred at the hands of a Frankish warrior called *Dæghrefn* 'Day Raven', whom Beowulf later crushed to death (2497–508). If Beowulf acquired Nægling *before* Hygelac's death, it might have been the weapon of Hygelac's father, Hreðel, which Hygelac gave to Beowulf upon the hero's return from Denmark, and which was the finest sword in Geatland at that time (2190–4).¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, if Beowulf acquired Nægling *after* avenging Hygelac, it might have been Dæghrefn's sword, which Beowulf took from the corpse; then again, it may have been another sword belonging to Hygelac that came into Beowulf's possession after he had avenged his lord.¹⁰⁶

Several modern editions of *Beowulf* encourage belief that Nægling was either Dæghrefn's or a posthumous gift from Hygelac by attributing the word *syððan* in line 2501 the conjunctive meaning 'since', rather than the adverbial sense 'then'/'afterward' (which would mark the start of a new sentence and potentially a separate topic), in a passage in which Beowulf reflects on how he had repaid Hygelac for his gifts:¹⁰⁷

ʿIc him þa maðmas þe he me sealde,
 geald æt guðe, swa me gifeðe wæs,
 leohtan sweorde; he me lond forgeaf,
 eard eðelwyn. Næs him ænig þearf
 þæt he to Gifðum oððe to Gar-Denum
 oððe in Swiorice secean þurfe
 wyrsan wigfreca, weorðe gecypan:
 symle ic him on feðan beforan wolde,
 ana on orde, ond swa to aldre sceall
 sæcce fremman, þenden þis sword þolað
 þæt mec ær ond sið oft gelæste,
 syððan ic for dugeðum Dæghrefne wearð
 to handbonan, Huga cempan ...' (2490–502)

ʿI repaid him [i.e., Hygelac] in battle for those treasures which he gave me, as it was granted (by destiny) to me, with a/the radiant [literally 'light'] sword

105 See *KB*, 248 (n. to 2501 ff.).

106 See, again, *KB*, 248 (n. to 2501 ff.). For the latter possibility, see *SASE*, 142–4.

107 See *KB*, 434; Wrenn and Bolton, *Beowulf*, 191; Swanton, *Beowulf*, 153–5; Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, 136; Kiernan, *Electronic Beowulf*. See also, however, *ASPR* 4, 77, 246 n., and *KB*, 254 (n. to 2680b).

[i.e., Hreðel's sword?]; he gave me land, the joy of a hereditary estate. There was not any necessity for him, that he should need to look to the Gifðas or to the Spear-Danes or in Sweden to buy a worse warrior for a price: I would always be before him in the foot-troop, alone at point, and so shall I always do battle, as long as this sword endures, which early and late has often served me, *since* I, before the mature warriors, became hand-slayer of Dæghrefn, champion of the Hugas [i.e., Franks] ...'

One reason for thinking that Nægling was formerly Hygelac's sword, rather than Dæghrefn's, lies in its failure to kill the dragon. Here it fulfils a role identifiable from many Old Norse sagas, namely that of the 'useless weapon', whose failure has to be remedied by another weapon or, in this case, two: Wiglaf's sword and Beowulf's *seax*.¹⁰⁸ Weapons that perform the 'useless' role are normally gifts from 'a king or other host of the hero',¹⁰⁹ who in this case could be the deceased Hygelac or his representative.

If Nægling were Hygelac's sword, earlier it could have been Healfdene's 'firebrand', which the *eodor Ingwina* 'shelter of the Ing-friends' had given to Beowulf, and which Beowulf had then given to Hygelac (2152–4).¹¹⁰ And if Hygelac had possessed a sword of the Ing-Friends, this would encourage interpretation of *incgelafe* (better *Incgelafe*) as 'with the In(c)ge-leaving'.¹¹¹

Whether or not Nægling and Healfdene's 'firebrand' are the same weapon, '(with the) In(c)ge-leaving' seems to me the likeliest explanation of *incgelafe*. If this is correct, it raises the possibility that the other chief swords wielded by Beowulf (Hrunting and the giant sword) were similarly 'Ing-leavings', especially as they were held by, respectively, the next lord of the Ing-Friends (Hroðgar) and his close associate (Unferð).

Ingunar-Freyr and Freyr's Sword

Another grand title, this time not of Hroðgar but Freyr, merits attention in the context of traditions about Ing and sword-giving: ON *Ingunar-Freyr*.

108 On this topic, see Jorgensen, 'Gift', which does not mention Nægling, however.

109 Jorgensen, 'Gift', 87. Jorgensen considers Hroðgar's gift of Healfdene's sword a 'blind motif' (87–8). It would not be if this sword were identifiable as Nægling.

110 See also SASE, 143.

111 The presence of suffixed *incge-* in *incgelafe* can be explained by the demands of metre. If the reading were **incglafe* (cf. *Ingwina*), the a-verse would be one metrical position short.

Whoever *Ingun(n)(?)* (Ing's wife?) or *Inguni(?)*¹¹² may have been, this title presumably incorporates the name *Ing-* and therefore appears likely to be related to *Yngvi-Freyr*. Possibly it derives from **Ing-vinar-freyr* 'Ing-friend's lord',¹¹³ a term that, despite the difference in the number of friends, would be comparable to OE *frea Ingwina*.

Ingunar-Freyr appears in stanza 43 of the Eddic poem *Lokasenna* 'Loki's Flyting'.¹¹⁴ It is uttered by Byggvir, Freyr's aggressive barley-spirit servant,¹¹⁵ in response to an accusation by Loki that Freyr had given away his golden sword in exchange for the daughter of the giant Gymir—a story I examine in the next chapter.

Hroðgar as *Frea*

Hroðgar's second Ing-title, *frea Ingwina*, used immediately before Beowulf learns of the attack by Grendel's mother, brings the Danish king into direct connection not just with Ing but with OE *frea* 'lord'. This noun is cognate with the Old Norse theonym *Freyr*, a word we have seen combined with a likely cognate of OE *Ing* in ON *Ingvi/Yngvi-Freyr*.¹¹⁶ The title may encapsulate an identification of Hroðgar, as 'lord of Ing-Friends', with the god himself. If so, Hroðgar would be tantamount to Ing incarnate.¹¹⁷ We may compare how, in *Qgmundar þáttr dytts*, Gunnarr dons the clothes of Freyr's idol and, aided by mild weather and the agreement of Freyr's wife, succeeds in passing himself off as Freyr, god of the Swedes. As such,

112 For ON *Ynguni*, see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 34.

113 *HG*, 27–8.

114 For another instance, see P. A. Munch and C. R. Unger (ed.), *Saga Olafs konungs ens helga* (Christiania, 1853), 2.

115 Cf. the ancestral Danish figure of *Beow* 'Barley' in *Beowulf* (18); also Beowulf himself, if his name is analyzed as *Beow-wulf* 'Barley-Wolf'.

116 Note too Beowulf's description as *freadrihten* 'frea-lord' (*freadrihtnes* 796) when defending Heorot against Grendel in Hroðgar's stead. An Anglian collection of royal genealogies refers to *Uoden Frealafing* 'Woden, offspring of Frealaf [literally 'Frea-leaving']', from which an Anglo-Saxon incarnate god(?) Frea might be tentatively inferred; for the texts, see Dumville, 'Anglian Collection'.

117 Cf. D. Panchenko, 'Solar Light and the Symbolism of the Number Seven', *Hyperboreus: Studia Classica* 12 (2006), 21–36 at 34 (amid a discussion of Apollo): 'Sun-gods are revered mostly by mighty rulers or theologians, rather than by common people. Typically, ... only those sun-gods acquired prominence who were not just sun-gods, but who managed to combine their connection with the most conspicuous object in the sky with powers and qualities characteristic of a human individual. And when this happens, the features that originally marked his divine character tend to retreat into the shadows.'

it is potentially significant that, of the three titles the *Beowulf*-poet gives Hroðgar when the king receives the giant sword's hilt, the second, central one is *frea* 'lord': *hit on æht gehwearf ... Denigea frean* 'it [i.e., the hilt] passed [or 'returned'?] into the possession ... of the Danes' lord' (1679–80).

Noteworthy, too, is the fact that only five lines before Hroðgar's designation as *frea Ingwina*, he is described waiting to see whether the *alfwalda* 'elf-ruler' (1314) would grant him a change of fortune after the death of his councillor, Æschere. If *alfwalda* is not a scribal error for *alwalda* 'all-ruling (one)' (i.e., God),¹¹⁸ it could be a term for an English counterpart of Freyr, as *Grímnismál* 5 identifies Freyr as the owner — and therefore presumably ruler — of *Álfheimr* 'Elf-World'.¹¹⁹

Wealhþeo's *Brosinga Mene* and Freyja's *Brísingamen*

Hroðgar seems not to be alone in standing in close relationship to Ing/Ingvi-Freyr. Before Beowulf's descent into the mere we find a likely implicit point of connection between Hroðgar's wife and Freyr's wife in relation to the gift of another ancestral treasure. Hroðgar's spouse, Wealhþeo(w), presents Beowulf with a marvellous neckring which the poet likens to the *Brosinga mene*. The treasure to which the neckring is compared doubtless equates to the *Brísingamen* 'torc of the Brísingar [dwarves?]' of Old Norse mythology, despite the difference in the words' first vowels.

According to *Drymskviða* and the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Sörla þáttr* 'Tale of Sörlí', the *Brísingamen* was owned by the goddess Freyja. She was Freyr's sister and, judging from their complementary names — *Freyr* 'Lord' and *Freyja* 'Lady' — and from the incestuousness of the divine Vanir-tribe to which they belonged, probably also his wife or consort.¹²⁰ Additionally, *Lokasenna* 20 reports that the god Heimdallr gave an item of jewellery, most likely the *Brísingamen* or a close equivalent, to the goddess Gefjon, who, in origin, may be one and the same as Freyja.¹²¹

118 As assumed in *KB*, 198 n. to line 1314.

119 See P. B. Taylor and P. H. Salus, 'Old English *Alf Walda*', *Neophilologus* 66 (1982), 440–2; Taylor, *Sharing Story*, 101. For another defence of *alfwalda*, as a reference to Beowulf, see R. P. Tripp, Jr., 'Beowulf 1314a: The Hero as *Alfwalda*, "Ruler of Elves"', *Neophilologus* 70 (1986), 630–32.

120 On Freyja, see B.-M. Näsström, *Freyja — the Great Goddess of the North* (Lund, 1995).

121 Näsström, *Freyja*, 22, 51, 100–1, 148, 186; U. Dronke (ed.), *The Poetic Edda: Volume II, Mythological Poems* (Oxford, 1997), 360. For a study arguing that Wealhþeo has

Freawaru

Hroðgar's daughter is also linked to Freyr in *Beowulf*. She is called *Freawaru*, which has *frea* as its first element. Her name might be interpreted as 'Lord-Merchandise', in view of kings' use of their daughters as gifts with which to forge alliances. Alternatively, it might simply identify her as the possession of the divine lord.¹²²

The Danes and the 'Life-Lord'

One last potential connection between the Danish monarch and Ing/Freyr to consider in this chapter may be intimated near the start of *Beowulf*, together with a foreshadowing of the Geatish Beowulf as divinely sanctioned saviour of the Danes. We hear how, in view of their formerly *aldorlease* 'lord/life-less' (15) plight, the Danes received a divine blessing in the form of a figure with a name unmistakably similar to that of the titular hero, namely *Beow* 'Barley':¹²³

Him þæs Liffrea,
wuldres wealdend, woroldare forgeaf:
*Beow*¹²⁴ wæs breme— blæd wide sprang—
Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in. (16–9)

For that (plight), the Life-Lord, ruler of brilliance, granted them worldly honour: Beow was renowned—his glory/leaf sprang widely—Scyld's heir in Skâne-lands [i.e., the Danish realm].

valkyrie-like traits, see Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow*; if this is the case, it potentially associates her with Freyja, since, according to *Grímnismál* 14, Freyja chooses hall-seats for half the warriors who are slain in battle each day—like a valkyrie. However, rather than meaning 'Slaughter-Servant' or 'Servant of the (Chosen) Slain', as Damico proposes, *Wealhþeo* may well have originally been **Wælþeo* 'Chosen/Beloved Servant', in which case the name did nothing to meaningfully characterize its bearer; see L. Neidorf, 'Wealhtheow and her Name: Etymology, Characterization, and Textual Criticism', *Neophilologus* 102 (2018), 75–89.

122 It is curious that her name does not accord with the Danish dynasty's principle of giving their children names beginning with *H-*. Saxo Grammaticus knew a corresponding woman as *Ruta*, a feminized latinization of ON *Hrútr* 'Ram', a word from the same linguistic base as *Heorot* 'Hart'; see K. Malone, 'Freawaru', *ELH* 7 (1940), 39–44.

123 *Beow* is suggestive of Freyr's barley-servant *Byggvir*. The name is corrupted to *Beowulf* in the manuscript.

124 An emendation of the manuscript reading *Beowulf*.

Here *frea* makes its first appearance in the poem in the term *Liffrea* 'Life-Lord', evidently a deity who wields *wuldor* 'brilliance, glory'. The life this god granted was a royal son (implicitly an *aldor* 'prince/life') called *Beow* who flourished like a plant, in keeping with the meaning of his name, and as if it were springtime when the sun's *wuldor* 'brilliance' returned.¹²⁵ This deity may be identified with the Judaeo-Christian God, but the details, albeit not altogether distinctive, also accord with what we learn about Freyr from Old Norse sources.¹²⁶ For, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, Freyr was a deity who controlled the sun and the seasons, and who was especially associated with good weather. He was also the *veraldargoð* 'world's god', a dynastic progenitor, and a bestower of peace and *ár* 'fruitfulness'.¹²⁷

125 Cf. the analogy of the vernal thaw following Beowulf's liberation of the Danes from Grendel and his mother (1605–11).

126 Cf. Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 16 on Scyld's departure shortly afterwards *on frean wære* 'into the Lord's keeping' (27): 'Frea is the (Christian) "Lord", but also the god Freyr in English form—the god with whom Yngvi (Ing) is identified in Norse.'

127 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 25; also *SnEGylf*, 24 (quoted in Chapter 9 below). Cf. the Life-Lord's gift of *woroldare* (17) to the Danes, and see HG, 194–5.

7. Freyr, Skírnir and Gerðr

Further possible clues to the relevance of myths concerning the god Yngvi-Freyr and his circle may be found in Beowulf's adventure in the mere. This episode displays a lengthy series of correspondences—to my knowledge, previously unrecognized—to an Old Norse story involving Freyr, his emissary Skírnir and a giantess called Gerðr. This myth is recounted principally in the Eddic poem *För Skírnis* 'Skírnir's Journey' (alias *Skírnismál* 'Skírnir's Words'), briefly referred to in *Lokasenna*, and retold by Snorri in *Gylfaginning*.¹ Despite many differences of detail, the correspondences between *För Skírnis* and *Beowulf*'s mere-episode may well indicate that they are related as independent variations, which employ similar story-patterns, on essentially the same mythic theme.² This theme, I propose, concerned a sun-controlling god who suffered anguish because of an encounter with a hostile giantess whose body contained sunlight, and who is subsequently overcome by the sun-god's armed emissary when he visits her in her water-enclosed home. It is of particular interest that the two weapons wielded by either hero may well correspond, as this could shed light on the nature of Hrunting and the giant sword.

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- 1 *SnEGylf*, 30–1, largely an expurgated prose adaptation of *För Skírnis*. For a study of these accounts, see P. Bibire, 'Freyr and Gerðr: The Story and its Myths', in R. Simek, Jónas Kristjánsson and H. Bekker-Nielsen (ed.), *Sagnaskemmtun: Studies in Honour of Hermann Pálsson on his 65th Birthday, 26th May 1986* (Vienna, 1986), 19–40. For a comparison of *För Skírnis* to another Old English poem, see P. R. Orton, 'The Wife's Lament and *Skírnismál*: Some Parallels', in R. McTurk and A. Wawn (ed.), *Úr Dölum til Dala: Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays* (Leeds, 1989), 205–37.
 - 2 For a review of prior scholarship (including nature-mythological studies) and a detailed commentary on the Norse poem, see K. von See, B. La Farge, E. Picard, I. Priebe and K. Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Bd. 2: Götterlieder* (Heidelberg, 1997), 45–151. A significant edition of the poem is Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 373–414.

In this chapter, therefore, I focus on the similarities between *Fǫr Skírnis* and *Beowulf's* mere-episode,³ many of which are neither obvious nor compelling individually, but which may impress as a quite lengthy sequence. Additionally, I examine the evidence of *Lokasenna*, the further adventures of Hjálmpér and Snarvendill in *Hjálmpés saga*, and an episode from the medieval English *Historia monasterii de Abingdon* 'History of the Monastery of Abingdon'.

Fǫr Skírnis and *Beowulf's* Mere-Episode

Fǫr Skírnis records that Freyr looked into *Jǫtunheimar* 'Giant Homes', the land of giants, and suffered *hugsóttir miklar* 'great mind/heart-sicknesses' after seeing a fair maiden walk from her father's halls to her bower. Freyr's parents instructed his servant, Skírnir (whom scholars generally identify as a hypostasis of his master), to persuade him to talk.⁴

Skírnir asked Freyr why he sat alone for days on end. In reply, Freyr asked why he should tell Skírnir of his *mikinn móðtrega* 'great mood-grief', before adding obscurely '*þvíat álfrǫðull lýsir um alla daga / ok þeygi at mínum munum*' (4) "'because the elf-halo shines through all days, and yet not to my desires.'" Skírnir pressed Freyr to explain, which he did:

‘Í Gymis gǫrðum ek sá ganga
mér tíða mey;
armar lýstu, en af þaðan
alt lopt ok lǫgr.

‘Mær er mér tíðari en manni hveim
ungum í árdaga;
Ása ok álfa þat vill engi maðr,
at vit sáttt sémm.’ (6–7)

'In Gymir's courts I saw walking a girl for whom I long; her arms gleamed,
and from them all the sky and sea.

3 See additionally Chapter 9.

4 In addition to his role as emissary in the following story, Skírnir was sent by Óðinn down to the world of black-elves to command some dwarves to make a fetter for the monstrous wolf Fenrir; see *SnEGylf*, 28; S. A. Mitchell, 'Skírnir's Other Journey: The Riddle of Gleipnir', in S. Hansson and M. Malm (ed.), *Gudar på jorden: Festskrift till Lars Lönnroth* (Stockholm, 2000), 67–75. Later in this study I discuss events relating to Fenrir's binding in connection with myths of the sun and moon.

‘The girl is lovelier to me than [any girl was?] to any young man in ancient days; of the Æsir and the elves no-one will wish it, that we should be united.’

It seems that this radiant girl has replaced in Freyr’s affections the sun, the ‘elf-halo’,⁵ of which he was normally in cheerful command.⁶ She is subsequently named as Gerðr ‘She of the *Garðr*/*Gerði* [i.e., (Inhabited) Enclosed Space]’ (probably), daughter of the giant Gymir.⁷ That her arms illuminated the sky and sea, but not (explicitly at least) the land, might be significant, as we shall find that Gymir, in whose *garðar* ‘enclosed spaces’ Gerðr lived, may well have been a sea-giant;⁸ this suggests that his giantess daughter lived in or by the sea—judging from her name, on sea-enclosed ground. We may compare Grendel’s mother, who, though not a maiden, was similarly a giantess who lived with a male giant (though her son, rather than her father) in a hall enclosed by water, and from whose body (albeit only when decapitated) may have come a sun-like radiance.⁹

Having learnt the reason for Freyr’s suffering, Skírnir made a dramatic request of him:

‘Mar gefðu mér þá, þann er mik um myrkvan beri,
vísan vafフロga,
ok þat sverð er sjálft vegiz
við jötna ætt!’ (8)

‘Then give me the horse, the one that can bear me through dark, discerning flicker-flame, and the sword that fights by itself against the family of giants!’

5 *Álfrøðull* is the name of the personified sun in *Vafþrúðnismál* 47. With the luminous arms of Freyr’s love, compare the personified sun casting her right hand over the horizon (or a creature) in an image of the first dawn in *Völuspá* 5; also the rosy fingers and rosy or golden arms of Eos, goddess of dawn, in ancient Greek mythology.

6 For evidence for Freyr’s control of the sun and solar attributes, see Chapter 9.

7 Gerðr also appears among a catalogue of goddesses in a verse list in *PTP*, 763; cf. *SnESkald*, I, 1. Given the meaning of her name, it is interesting to find that her alliterative partner in this list is Gefjon, a goddess who ploughed Zealand into existence, who married *Skjöldr* (*Beowulf*’s *Scyld*, founder of the *Scyldingas*) and who lived at Lejre, the likely historical site of Heorot; see Simek, *Dictionary*, 101–2. On Gefjon, see H. E. Davidson, ‘Gefjon, Goddess of the Northern Seas’, in P. Lysaght, S. Ó Catháin and D. Ó hÓgáin (ed.), *Islanders and Water-Dwellers: Proceedings of the Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium held at University College Dublin 16–19 June 1996* (Blackrock, 1999), 51–9; also F. Battaglia, ‘The Germanic Earth Goddess in *Beowulf*?’, *Mankind Quarterly* 31 (1991), 415–46, for a proposed link between Gefjon and Grendel’s mother.

8 Snorri, however, says that *allir heimar birtusk af henni* ‘all worlds were illuminated by her [i.e., Gerðr]’; *SnEGylf*, 31.

9 See further Chapter 15.

Skírnir, we gather, was willing to undertake a quest to win the giantess for his master.

Freyr agreed:

‘Mar ek þér þann gef, er þik um myrkvan berr
 vísan vafroga,
 ok þat sverð, er sjálft mun vegaz,
 ef sá er horskr, er hefir.’ (9)

‘I give you the horse that will bear you through dark, discerning flicker-flame, and the sword that will fight by itself, if he who has it is wise.’

As Skírnir effectively serves as the executive of the distressed *Freyr* by undertaking to win Gerðr on his own, so Beowulf undertakes to conquer Grendel’s mother on behalf of the distressed *frea* of the Ing-friends, who declared that help relied on him alone (*Beowulf* 1376–9). Additionally, rather as Skírnir received Freyr’s remarkable sword, so Beowulf received from Unferð, *ðyle Hroðgares* ‘Hroðgar’s spokesman’ (1456), an outstanding ancestral sword, Hrunting, which had never failed its wielder. Neither sword would prove up to the challenge this time, however. It also catches the eye that both sword-donors—Freyr and Unferð—are identifiable as brother-slayers, albeit in different respects. In *Fyr Skírnis*, Gerðr, on sensing Skírnir’s arrival, suspects that her *bróðurbani* ‘brother’s slayer’ is outside (16); Freyr is recorded as having killed the giant Beli after he had given his sword to Skírnir,¹⁰ so here Gerðr might be referring to a future slaying that she has foreseen or heard prophesied, or to a prior event; more likely, though, she simply refers to the giant-killing sword of Freyr in Skírnir’s hand. In *Beowulf*, the hero had earlier reminded Unferð that *ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde* ‘you became slayer of your brothers’ (*Beowulf* 587). The elements *bróður-* and *-bani* in ON *bróðurbani* are cognate with *Beowulf*’s *broðrum* and *banan*, respectively.¹¹

Having received Freyr’s sword, Skírnir set out for giantland in darkness on Freyr’s (presumably solar) horse.¹² Skírnir declares to the

10 *SnEGylf*, 31.

11 Old English poetry attests only one other alliterative pairing of *broður* ‘brother’ and *bana* ‘slayer’, in *Genesis A* (1526); A. N. Doane (ed.), *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison, 1978), 153.

12 Cf. *MIFL*, motif A732.2 ‘Horse of the sun’.

horse: *‘Myrkt er úti, mál kveð ek okr fara úrig fjöll yfir!’* *“‘It’s dark outside—time, I say, for us two to journey over moist mountains!’”* (*För Skírnis* 10). The darkness (i.e., absence of sunlight) is noteworthy, whether it indicates day or night. Although Beowulf marched, rather than rode, to Grendel’s mere (unlike Hroðgar), and did not set out in the dark, he also passed through darkness, as the land through which he strode was shrouded in *genipu* ‘darknesses, mists’ (*Beowulf* 1360) and from the mere itself a *won* ‘dark’ surge of water ascended to the clouds (1373–4). Additionally, with the moist mountains of *För Skírnis* we may compare *Beowulf’s* *fyrgenstream* ‘mountain-stream’ (1359), which the hero would similarly have passed.

Skírnir’s horse apparently crossed without incident the ‘dark, discerning [literally ‘wise’] flicker-flame’ (*För Skírnis* 8–9) guarding the giants’ abode.¹³ This flame is also described as an *eikinn fúr* ‘oaken fire’ (17–8), by which, given oak’s properties as excellent firewood, is presumably meant a very strong and enduring fire. Whether or not the mythological Old Norse river *Eikin* is pertinent,¹⁴ this remarkable fire finds parallel in the eerie fire on, or in, the waters of Grendel’s turbulent mere (*Beowulf* 1365–6),¹⁵ which occurred only by night and similarly failed to hinder Beowulf’s (daytime) dive into the mere. That, in both cases, the mysterious fire plays no part in the story after its initial mention may be significant.

Skírnir then found his progress temporarily blocked by ferocious hounds (*För Skírnis* 11). These may find parallel in the wolves that haunted the slopes around Grendel’s mere, though Beowulf would have encountered them *before* any fire on the flood.¹⁶ They doubtless

13 For thoughts on the nature of this flame, see Chapter 14.

14 Perhaps the fire was originally the **Eikin-fúr* ‘Eikin-fire’, which is to say a fire on the *Eikin*, a river identified in *Grímnismál* 27 as one of those that fall near men and descend from there to Hell—like that which passes beneath the earth at Grendel’s mere (*Beowulf* 1359–61). For alternative explanations of this river-name, which lacks the diphthong in most of the younger manuscripts that mention it, see C. S. Hale, ‘The River Names in *Grímnismál* 27–29’, in R. J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (ed.), *Edda: A Collection of Essays* (Manitoba, 1983), 165–86 at 168–9; *PTP*, 838, 40.

15 Note also, in another Eddic poem discussed in Chapters 8 and 15, the flame surrounding a hall called *Lýr*. If I am correct in identifying this hall as, originally at least, a ‘Pike’ (fish), this suggests that the fire was in or on water.

16 Since Gerðr’s home, like Grendel’s, seems equated with the world of the dead, compare also the hellhound that threatens Óðinn in the Eddic poem *Baldrs draumar* ‘Baldr’s Dreams’ (2–3) and the Greek Cerberus.

deterred many visitors, though they did not directly hinder Beowulf. Comparison might also be made with the minor mere-beasts that vainly attacked Beowulf in the water, though no canine or lupine nature is indicated for those—unlike Grendel’s mother.

Next Skírnir encountered a herdsman who was sitting on a burial mound and watching all ways. Skírnir asked him how he might pass the dogs in order to speak with Gerðr. The herdsman replied bluffly by asking whether the visitor was doomed or already dead (12). This watchful herdsman finds surprising parallel, I think, in Grendel’s mother (who, we shall see, is also and more importantly equivalent to Gerðr), although she does not sit on a mound or speak to her visitor. The masculine pronoun *se* ‘he’ (*Beowulf* 1497) denotes Grendel’s mother as she *beheold* ‘beheld’ (1498) the waters; and Beowulf later identifies her, again in grammatically masculine terms, as *grimne gryrelicne grundhyrde* ‘the grim, terrible sea-bed/depths/ground-herdsman’ (2136).¹⁷ Beowulf, it therefore appears, was similarly met by a vigilant herdsman associated with aggressive canids. And their meeting similarly occurred at a place, likened to Hell, to which there normally came only the doomed or the dead.

Gerðr then heard a resounding noise and felt the ground shaking (*Før Skírnis* 14). Her maidservant explained that a man had arrived outside and dismounted. Somewhat similarly, Grendel’s mother *onfunde* ‘perceived’ (*Beowulf* 1497) her visitor’s arrival, presumably from vibrations as he and the mere’s creatures disturbed the water.

Gerðr invited Skírnir into her *sal* ‘hall’ for a drink, past the guard-dogs (*Før Skírnis* 16). Similarly, Grendel’s mother’s brought (albeit violently) Beowulf, as her *gist* ‘guest’ (*Beowulf* 1522), into her *niðsele* ‘hostile/abyssal/dark-moon(?) hall’ (1513), her *hrofsele* ‘roofed hall’ (1515)—ON *sal* and OE *sele* are cognate nouns—out of the sea-beasts’ clutches.

When asked to identify himself, Skírnir declared that he was not one of the elves, the Æsir or the Vanir (*Før Skírnis* 17–8), which, unless he

17 DOE s.v. *hyrde* ‘herdsman; keeper, guardian’. DOE defines *grund-hyrde* as ‘guardian of the depths (an epithet for Grendel’s mother)”; KB, 388 interprets this unique compound as ‘guardian of the deep’. Admittedly, OE *hyrde* is used quite frequently in *Beowulf*; for example, Grendel is the *hyrde* of crimes (750), God is the *hyrde* of glory (931), Grendel and his mother are *hyrdas* of their submarine house (1666), and the dragon is a *hyrde* of treasure (3133).

is lying, may make him a giant, a dwarf or a (super)man. *Beowulf* faces no such challenge, but he was a superman of giant-like strength, whose father's name, *Ecgþeo(w)* 'Edge-Servant', is cognate with ON *Eggþér*, the name of a giantess's herdsman in *Völuspá* 42.

Skírnir began wooing Gerðr by offering her golden apples and a marvellous ring, all of which she refused because, she declared, she had more than enough gold in Gymir's home (*För Skírnis* 19–22). *Beowulf* offered Grendel's mother no treasures, but he did see many *maðmæhta* 'treasures' (*Beowulf* 1613) in her lair, many of which were doubtless golden.

Next Skírnir threatened Gerðr with decapitation by his (Freyr's) sword, a threat by which she was unmoved (*För Skírnis* 23–4). Skírnir's unsuccessful threat, uttered in an attempt to acquire Gerðr, may find parallel in the *grædig guðleoð* 'greedy battle-song' (*Beowulf* 1522) sung by Hrunting against the head of Grendel's mother.¹⁸ As Skírnir's threat with a sword was rebuffed by Gerðr's words, so Hrunting's singing blow was resisted by Grendel's mother's head.

Gerðr, therefore, initially had the upper hand in the contest. But Skírnir did not relent. He added that Gymir—a *jotunn ... feigr* 'giant ... doomed', rather as Grendel was earlier an *eoten* 'giant' (*Beowulf* 761) *fæge* 'doomed' (846) (the pairs of words are cognate)—*hnígr* 'sinks' or 'will sink' by the edges of his sword (*För Skírnis* 25).¹⁹ Similarly, in *Beowulf*, the giantess initially had the advantage, but *Beowulf* did not give up. Having earlier *gehnægde* 'laid low' Grendel (*Beowulf* 1274; this verb is related to ON *hnígr*) by tearing off his arm, he later beheaded him with a sword, albeit a different sword, the giant sword, not Hrunting.

Skírnir then seems to have given up on the sword that Freyr had given him—at least we do not hear of it again.²⁰ He turned instead to what seems, ostensibly at least, to be a different weapon. Comparably,

18 For other accounts of swords with voices, see *SASE5-7*, 419.

19 The etymology of *Gymir* is uncertain. The name might relate to ON *gyma*, a poetic term for 'earth', or to *geyma* 'to keep, watch' or *gumi* 'man'; in this last case, compare Grendel as a *guma* 'man' in *Beowulf* (973, 1682). A. M. Sturtevant, 'Three Old Norse Words: Gamban, Ratatoskr, and Gymir', *SS* 28 (1956), 109–14 at 112–4 argues that *Gymir* derives from *Ymir* (specifically **Ga-ymir*) and originally meant 'The Roarer'. For Dronke and Dronke, *Growth of Literature*, 36 n. 78, however, *Gymir* derives from 'the same stem as *gómr*, "gums"' ... *Gymir* is, as it were, a variant of *Ægir*'s "jaws", which swallow ships'; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 356. See also *PTP*, 707–9.

20 An instance of the 'useless weapon' motif not mentioned in Jorgensen, 'Gift'.

Beowulf discarded Hrunting, the loan from Unferð, and resorted to the giant sword.

Skírnir declared '*Tamsvendi ek þik drep*' 'With a taming wand I strike [or 'will strike'] you' (*För Skírnis* 26). He accompanied the use or threat of this wand, or sword,²¹ with declarations that Gerðr would be condemned to a sorrowful life of sexual frustration with giants, deprived the love of men, *fyr nágrindr neðan ... á viðar rótum* 'below corpse-gates ... at the roots of the tree [i.e., Yggdrasil]', which is to say in Hel (26–31, 33–5).²² Amid this curse, Skírnir abruptly revealed that:²³

'Til holts ek gekk ok til hrás viðar,
gambantein at geta,
gambantein ek gat.' (32)

'I went to a/the wood and to a/the sappy tree/wood, a/the *gambanteinn* to get,
a/the *gambanteinn* I got.'

When he went to this wood is unclear, as is the wood's location, because no such wood or trip has been mentioned before, though ultimately Gerðr agrees to meet Freyr at a grove (on an island?) called Barri (41). It seems to me likely, however, that the reference is to a wood in or bordering giantland (see Chapter 16). Also previously unmentioned is the object of this trip, the *gambanteinn* (*-teinn* means 'twig'), a weapon quite likely identifiable as the 'taming wand'. It may be significant that the reference to the *gambanteinn* comes long after Skírnir's receipt of Freyr's sword—a weapon from which it does not, however, appear wholly distinct. Similarly, Beowulf's surprise discovery of the giant sword, which will come to appear comparable to the *gambanteinn*, occurs during a somewhat sexually suggestive encounter with a giantess after his receipt of Hrunting—and we shall see later that these two weapons are probably not wholly distinct either. Beowulf, did not, however, acquire the giant sword from a wood but from the wall of the giants' cave.

21 For *vöndr* 'wand' as a poetic term for 'sword', see LP s.v. The sword Snarvendill/Hrotti is termed a *sara uendi* (nominative *vöndr*) 'wand of wounds' in *Hjálmpés rímur*.

22 Cf. C. Tolkien, *The Saga of Heidrek the Wise* (London, 1960), 14–6, in which the radiant sword Tyrfingr (about which more later) is recovered from a grave-mound *undir viðar rótum* 'under the roots of the tree', below *helgrind* 'Hel-gate'.

23 The abruptness raises the possibility of textual disruption or interpolation, but this cannot be assumed.

ON *gambanteinn*—a full interpretation of which I reserve for Chapter 16—appears only once elsewhere in Old Norse literature. In *Hárbarðsljóð* ‘Hárbarðr’s Song’, which is the next poem in the *Codex Regius* manuscript of Eddic poems and the preceding poem in the AM 748 manuscript of Eddic poems, *Hárbarðr* ‘Hoary-Beard’ (Óðinn incognito) declares:

‘Miklar manvélar ek hafða við myrkriður,
þá er ek vélta þær frá verum!
Harðan jötun ek hugða Hlébarð vera;
gaf hann mér gambantein,
en ek vélta hann ór viti!’ (20)

‘Great girl-tricks I had against gloom-riders, when I tricked them away from men! A hard giant I thought *Hlébarðr* ‘Lee/Shelter-Beard’ to be; he gave me a/ the *gambanteinn*, and I wangled him out of his wits!’

Here it may be that this *gambanteinn*—which could also be involved in the implicit seduction by trickery of the *myrkriður* (probably troll-women)²⁴—came from the giant’s presumably bushy *barðr* ‘beard’,²⁵ if it were likened, as is that of another giant called Hymir, to a wood.²⁶ At any rate, this obscure stanza raises the possibility that Skírnir also acquired his *gambanteinn* from a giant.²⁷ If, as seems a reasonable inference, Óðinn scrambled Hlébarðr’s wits by striking him with the *gambanteinn*, perhaps this weapon was some sort of magic wand (like Skírnir’s ‘taming wand’?). More specifically, I suspect, it was a marvellous ‘twig-sword’ (which may also be a *vöndr* ‘wand’), as the noun *teinn* ‘twig’ occurs elsewhere in poetic terms for ‘sword’.²⁸

24 *Myrkriða* ‘Murk-Rider’ appears among a list of names of troll-women in *PTP*, 729–30.

25 Two other meanings of ON *barðr*, though, are ‘edge of a hill’ and ‘prow of a ship’.

26 The Eddic *Hymiskviða* ‘Lay of Hymir’ (10) describes Hymir’s frozen beard, from which *jöklar* ‘icicles’ hung, as a *kinnskógr* ‘chin-forest’. Cf. also the twig-weapon called *Lævateinn* (discussed in Chapter 8), which, in another Eddic poem, appears implicitly likened to a hair plucked from a gleaming branch of the world-tree *Mimameiðr* ‘Mimi’s Tree’, Mimi (or Mími) possibly being a giant. According to *Grimnismál* 40, the world’s trees were formed from the hair of the giant Ymir. Another giant, *Distilbarði*, presumably had a beard of thistles; *PTP*, 707–9.

27 See further Chapter 16.

28 *LP* s.v. *teinn*; again, see the discussion of *Lævateinn* in Chapter 8. With Óðinn’s use of his *gambanteinn*, and Skírnir’s use of a rune-inscribed *gambanteinn* to overcome Gerðr’s resistance, compare also the striking by Othinus (Óðinn) of a Russian

It appears significant that Skírnir's *gambanteinn*, which seems likely to be the *tamsvöndr*, came specifically from a sappy tree. Sappy wood may have been favoured as a relatively soft surface on which to carve temporary runic inscriptions, as Skírnir soon does here.²⁹ This detail also encourages association of Skírnir's *gambanteinn* with the mythical sword called *Mistilteinn* 'Mistletoe' in Old Norse sagas (examined later in this study),³⁰ since the parasitic mistletoe 'prefers [as its host] trees with a soft sappy bark'.³¹ Two further points favour this association:

- (a) A description in *Gylfaginning* of the mistletoe-shaft that killed Baldr as both a *viðarteinungr*, literally a 'wood's/tree's twig', and a *vöndr*.³²
- (b) Skírnir's prior offer to Gerðr of the ring that had been burnt on Baldr's pyre (*För Skírnis* 21), which shows that Skírnir had another object closely associated with Baldr's death.

Next Skírnir carved on the *tamsvöndr/gambanteinn* hostile *stafi* 'runestaves' (*För Skírnis* 36), including *þurs* 'giant', *ergi* ... *ok óþola* 'sexual perversion ... and unendurable lust'.³³ Judging from other Old Norse evidence, the first of these may well have threatened to inflict the pain and bloody flux of menstruation upon Gerðr.³⁴

princess called Rinda *cortice carminibus adnotato* 'with a piece of bark inscribed with spells', which drove her mad after she had rejected his advances (*GD*, I, 164–7).

29 It is uncertain whether another Eddic poem refers to the inscription of a wounding runic spell on the roots of a sappy tree or of a strong tree; see D. A. H. Evans (ed.), *Hávamál* (London, 1986), 71, 138–9 (on stanza 151).

30 Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 56.

31 E. Campbell, 'The Magic and Mystery of Mistletoe' (2009), <http://www.hastingsnaturalhistory.org/page11.html>. *HG*, 38, however, compares the *gambanteinn* to the ivy-spear of the Greek god Dionysus.

32 *SnEGylf*, 45–6.

33 The alliterating phrase *ergi* ... *ok óþola* recurs in a similar, presumably related context in a late fourteenth-century runic curse carved on a stick from Bergen, Norway: *ylgjar ergi ok óþola* 'she-wolf's sexual perversion ... and unendurable lust'; J. McKinnell, R. Simek and K. Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook* (Vienna, 2004), 131–2; M. MacLeod and B. Mees, *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects* (Woodbridge, 2006), 34–9. This parallel may reinforce the lupine aspect of certain giants, such as Grendel's *brimvylf* 'sea-she-wolf' mother, which is argued for in this study and bolstered by the twin meanings 'giant' and 'wolf' of *tuss* and *tusse*, modern descendants of ON *þurs* 'giant' in some Swedish dialects; *ibid.*, 119. Also, in Chapter 9 I examine a Norse runic inscription that appears to identify a disease-spirit as both a 'giant' and a 'wolf'. Finally, note the giant-name *Hundalfr* 'Hound-Elf' in *PTP*, 722–3.

34 See Chapter 9.

At that, Gerðr gave in and cemented the marriage proposal with the offer of a drink (37). She agreed to meet Freyr in nine nights in a *lundr lognfara*—perhaps a ‘becalmed grove’ or a ‘grove of the fair-weather traveller [i.e., Freyr]’—on *Barri*, a name probably based on ON *barr* ‘pine needle’ or ‘barley’ and interpretable as ‘Pine Needle/Barley Isle’ (39).³⁵ Skírnir then returned home to report the good news to Freyr, who promptly declared that he could not wait three nights, one month often having seemed shorter to him than just *sjá hálf hýnott* ‘this half-nuptial night’ (42).³⁶ *För Skírnis* does not record whether Skírnir returned Freyr’s sword (*Lokasenna* strongly suggests and *Gylfaginning* clearly says that Freyr did not recover it), whereas Beowulf certainly returned Hrunting to Unferð. Otherwise, this series of events appears broadly comparable to those in *Beowulf*. Thus, Beowulf overcame Grendel’s mother with a remarkable sword discovered in Grendel’s lair,³⁷ a weapon inscribed (albeit not by him) with runes describing an event that led to the overcoming of transgressing giants in a flood. He then returned, through thawing, becalmed waters to Ing’s representative, Hroðgar.

Furthermore, in both texts the hero’s overcoming of the giantess has potentially phallic connotations. Skírnir’s threats against Gerðr with a sword (a potentially phallic symbol) and the *tamsvoendr/gambanteinn* are tantamount to sexual assault. The physical nature of Beowulf’s attack on Grendel’s mother with Hrunting and the giant sword is explicit; its acquisitive, sexual aspect is implicit. After a failed ‘greedy’ sword-blow, and a bout of wrestling in which Grendel’s mother threw and

35 *Gylfaginning* has the more transparent *Bar(r)ey*; *SnEGylf*, 31 (on 164 identified as probably Barra in the Scottish Hebrides).

36 The precise meaning of this passage is debated. I suggest that Gerðr scheduled her meeting with Freyr for nine nights (something of a ‘perfect’ number in Germanic tradition) after acceding to Skírnir’s demand because she knew how long it would take him and Freyr to travel the distances involved. If, as seems a not unreasonable guess, it took Skírnir six nights to ride home the challenging way he had come—past flickering flame, across wet mountains and over land—this would leave Freyr three nights to reach Barri. The ‘half nuptial night’ would be the first of those three nights, it being ‘half’, which suggests incompleteness, because his wife (his ‘other half’, if you will) was elsewhere. Perhaps Gerðr also appreciated that Freyr’s three-night wait, which began once he learnt of his marriage, would correspond to the normal period of marital chastity after a wedding (Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 193 n. 44, 414).

37 Although there is no physical killing of the giantess in *För Skírnis*, Gerðr is nevertheless conquered and her hostility overcome. Cf. Hjálmpér’s conquest of Vargeisa without killing her, and Sörlí’s defeat of Mána without killing her (both discussed earlier).

ofsæt 'pressed down upon' Beowulf, and in which he grabbed her by the shoulder (or hair) and neck, he penetrated her with a stroke of his sword, whereupon his blade melted. Given the erotic, phallic aspect of Anglo-Saxon 'sword'-riddles,³⁸ and the sexual aspect to the analogous encounter of Hjalmpér and Vargeisa (and her likely double Ýma, whom we shall meet shortly), it may be that the giant sword's 'waning' not only denotes the diminution of an iron blade imagined as a burning candle but also suggests the aftermath of coitus for the male party.³⁹

As mentioned earlier, there are unquestionably many differences between *För Skírnis* and the mere-adventure of *Beowulf*. Most obvious is the fact that Gerðr is the object of Freyr's ardent desire, whereas Grendel's mother is a creature which Beowulf wishes only to kill and which is the object of Hroðgar's fear and loathing. Perhaps, though, this apparently stark contrast may be explained by recognizing both cases as manifestations of the suffering attendant upon a form of solar darkening. As I hope to persuade readers by the end of this study, Gerðr is a likely lunar giantess who gleams with light stolen from the sun. Here her stolen lustre takes away some of the brightness of the sun and its appeal for Freyr, whose emissary then travels through darkness. Comparably, Grendel's mother brings the shadow of death back to the sun-like hall of Hroðgar, whose emissary then travels to her home through partial darkness.⁴⁰ If this is the case, no fewer than twenty sequential correspondences emerge between the Norse and Anglo-Saxon poems, which I summarize as follows:

- (a) A hostile, radiant, lunar giantess (Gerðr/Grendel's mother)⁴¹ brings anguish (albeit of different types) and a form of solar darkening to a Freyr-figure (Freyr/Hroðgar).

38 See *SASE*, 152–7; M. Salvador-Bello, 'The Sexual Riddle Type in Aldhelm's Enigmata, the Exeter Book, and Early Medieval Latin', *PQ* 90 (2011), 357–85.

39 Cf. Lyle, 'Hero', 7, 10. On scenes of the decapitation of giants as rites of passage linked to the hero's 'political, sexual, social coming of age' (my emphasis), see J. J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1999), 66. On arguments about whether certain swords may serve as phallic symbols, see Brunning, "'Living" Sword', I, 33–4; also *SASE* 5–7, 403–4. See also my analysis of the Langeid sword in Chapter 4.

40 For Heorot as a solar hall, see Chapter 10.

41 In neither poem does the giantess have an obviously lunar aspect, but for evidence pointing to the identification (originally at least) of these giantesses with the moon, which shines with light taken from the sun, see Chapters 14 to 16.

- (b) The giantess inhabits an enclosed environment, one quite possibly marine or semi-marine in both cases (certainly so in *Beowulf*).⁴²
- (c) She lives there with a formidable, hostile male giant (Gymir/Grendel).
- (d) A young, purifying emissary of the Freyr-figure (Skírnir/Beowulf) undertakes to win or defeat the giantess.⁴³
- (e) The emissary receives the renowned sword of the Freyr-figure or his representative (Unferð), who is a 'brother-slayer'.
- (f) The emissary sets out alone through darkness.
- (g) He crosses wet mountains.
- (h) He crosses the site of a marvellous boundary fire (possibly *ignis fatuus*),⁴⁴ associated in both cases with darkness, without apparent incident.
- (i) He passes hostile canids. (Elements (h) and (i) are possibly inverted in *Beowulf*.)
- (j) He approaches the giantess's hall.
- (k) He encounters a hostile, watchful herdsman (in *För Skírnis*, a figure separate from the giantess; in *Beowulf*, the giantess herself).
- (l) The giantess senses his arrival.
- (m) The giantess brings him into her hall, normally the destination of the doomed and the dead.
- (n) He (or his sword) addresses her acquisitively and with the threat of decapitation.
- (o) She resists him (verbally or physically)—the sword gifted by the Freyr-figure fails to overcome her.
- (p) The emissary proposes to kill the male giant with his sword (or, in *Beowulf*, shortly afterwards beheads the male giant with a different sword).

42 See further below.

43 For Skírnir and Beowulf as purifiers, see Chapter 9.

44 See Chapter 14.

- (q) The emissary turns to a second, more remarkable weapon, one inscribed (or potentially inscribed) with a runic inscription that has a bearing on the overcoming of a giant or giants, in both cases possibly in a form of flood. This weapon is a sword (or at least potentially so in *Før Skírnis*), possibly a radiant weapon which the emissary seized within the giants' land (arguably in the case of *Før Skírnis*).
- (r) The giantess's resistance is overcome, with implications of sexual penetration (future or current).
- (s) There is reference to good weather/sunshine and/or becalming.
- (t) The emissary returns to the Freyr-figure and reports his success.

Lokasenna, *Gylfaginning* and the Gifted Sword

A brief reference to the myth of Freyr and Gerðr appears in *Lokasenna*. Loki declares to Freyr that:

‘Gulli keypta léztu Gyimis dóttur
ok seldir þitt svá sverð;
en er Muspellz synir ríða Myrkvið yfir,
veizta þú þá, vesall, hvé þú veigr.’ (42)

‘With gold you had Gyimir’s daughter bought, and thus gave your sword;
but when Muspell’s sons ride over Myrkviðr, then, wretch, you won’t know
how you’ll fight.’

We have seen that in *Før Skírnis* (19–22), Skírnir—who is not named in *Lokasenna* but who might be the understood means by which Freyr had Gerðr bought—offers Gerðr golden apples and an implicitly golden and gold-dripping ring, which she refuses. In that poem her resistance is overcome by Skírnir’s runic threat, not his offers of golden treasure, although she may still have received that treasure later, after accepting Freyr. We also saw that Freyr had to give his sword to Skírnir, who used it to threaten Gerðr, in which capacity it was found wanting and apparently abandoned (literally or not). In *Lokasenna*, it is unclear to whom Freyr gave his sword. It is sometimes supposed that he gave it to the giants via Gerðr or her father, in which case *Lokasenna* seems likely to refer to a somewhat

different version of the story from that told in *För Skírnis*. But in *Lokasenna* it may rather be that, as in *För Skírnis*, Freyr simply gave his sword to his agent (Skírnir), so that he would agree to pursue the purchase. This would bring the two accounts into closer agreement.⁴⁵

In *Gylfaginning* Snorri records that Freyr gave his sword to Skírnir. He adds that this was why Freyr was weaponless when he fought Beli.⁴⁶

We have seen that, by contrast, Beowulf, despite initially casting away Hrunting in the giants' lair, recovered it and returned it to Unferð.

Gymir and Gerðr as Sea-Giants

The giant Gymir and his daughter Gerðr may well be inhabitants of a land enclosed by water in some way. If so, they appear comparable in this respect to Grendel and his mother, a giant and giantess who inhabited the strangely water-free bottom of a sea-like mere. Marine or semi-marine aspects to the homes of Gymir and Gerðr are not readily apparent from *För Skírnis*; nor is there explicit reference to Skírnir's *gambanteinn* being located underwater (which would greatly strengthen its likeness to Beowulf's giant sword). Nonetheless, in this section I adduce evidence that suggests both of the above.⁴⁷

More than one Old Norse source indicates that a figure called Gymir was identified with the sea. Most striking is the prose introduction to *Lokasenna*, the third poem after *För Skírnis* in the *Codex Regius*, which identifies Gymir as an alias of the sea-giant/god *Ægir* 'Ocean': *Ægir, er þðru nafni hét Gymir 'Ægir, who by another name was called Gymir'*. On the basis of this statement (which is perhaps a thirteenth-century addition), at least some readers of the *Codex Regius* would presumably interpret this Gymir as Gerðr's father and identify him with *Ægir*.⁴⁸

45 However, for a different view, which sees Loki's account as a travesty of the myth, see Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 366.

46 *SnEGylf*, 31.

47 I am not the first to associate these giants with the sea. For F. G. Bergmann, *Le Message de Skírnir et les Dits de Grímmir* (Strasbourg, 1871), 38, Gerðr personifies the winter sea. See also Dronke and Dronke, *Growth of Literature*, 36 for an identification of Gerðr as the earth and as the daughter of the sea, which is personified by her father Gymir; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 356, 387, 390 ('Gymir, the ocean of death'), 396–7.

48 The same prose introduction adds that in *Ægir/Gymir's* hall, which was doubtless in or by the sea, *var lýsigull haft fyrir eldzljós* 'shining gold was used instead of firelight', a point picked up in *SnESkald*, I, 40–1. Comparably, Grendel's submarine lair

An association between a certain Gymir and Ægir may well have been part of pagan Norse tradition. In *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri records a stanza by an eleventh-century Icelandic skald called Refr (Hofgarða-Refr Gestsson), who was probably a heathen:

Fœrir björn, þar er bára
brestr, undinna festa
opt í Ægis kjöpta
úrsvöl Gymis völvu.⁴⁹

The spray-cold seeress of Gymir [RÁN <Ægir's wife>] often brings the bear of twisted-fastenings [SHIP] into Ægir's jaws where the wave breaks.⁵⁰

Here one could, admittedly, read *ægis* 'the ocean's', rather than *Ægis* 'Ægir's'.⁵¹ But for Snorri: *Hér er sagt at alt er eitt, Ægir ok Hlér ok Gymir* 'Here it is said that all are one: Ægir and Hlér and Gymir'.⁵²

Whether the Gymir of these passages was originally the same as the giant of *För Skírnis* is doubtful.⁵³ For one thing, whereas Gerðr's father was married to a mountain-giantess called *Aurboða* 'Mud(dy)/Gravel(ly)-Offerer/Summoner',⁵⁴ Ægir's wife was *Rán* 'Theft/Robbery', a personification of the sea as illicit taker of ships and their crews.⁵⁵ For another, Gerðr is nowhere named as one of Ægir's nine daughters,

contained firelight or a fiery light. We may also recall the sunlike radiance probably associated with the golden-hilted giant sword, which was perhaps supplemented by light from other golden treasures in the monsters' lair. Cf. Abram, 'New Light'.

49 *SnESkald*, I, 37; the stanza is quoted again in *SnESkald*, I, 93.

50 Since waves break on the shore, I interpret 'Ægir's jaws' as jagged, ship-destroying coastal rocks.

51 So *PTP*, 245.

52 *SnESkald*, I, 37. Cf. a cluster of 'sea'-terms in *SnESkald*, I, 92: *ægir, gymir, hlér*.

53 Sturtevant, 'Three Old Norse Words', 113 states that 'No one, of course, assumes that the giant Gymir is the same person as Aeger [Ægir]' and adds (114) that '[t]he sea and the earth are two entirely different mythological conceptions'. This is no longer the case: see Dronke and Dronke, *Growth of Literature*, 36; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 356. Furthermore, the distinction between sea/water and earth is blurred when dealing with shores, floods, mud, tidal islands and, as in *Beowulf*, marshland and the submerged but dry and firelit home of amphibious giants.

54 *SnEGylf*, 30–1; also stanza 30 of the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* 'Hyndla's Poem'.

55 However, if *Aurboða* means 'Mud(dy)/Gravel(ly)-Summoner', this meaning appears potentially relatable to the concept of the sea as an acquirer of ships and their crews, which is encapsulated by *Rán*. In the next chapter we shall find *Aurboða* at the foot of mountain that may well be in the sea.

personifications of waves.⁵⁶ But even if Gerðr's father and Ægir were originally separate figures, their sharing of the name *Gymir* raises the distinct possibility of conflation.

Old Norse texts also attest a common noun *gymir* meaning 'sea', which is not always distinguishable from the proper noun.⁵⁷ For example, the compound *sargymir* 'wound-sea/Gymir', a poetic term for 'blood', appears in *Hákonarmál* 'Hákon's Lay', a poem by the Norwegian Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson (c. 915–90):

Brunnu benjeldar í blóðgum undum;
 lutu langbarðar at lýða fjörvi.
 Svarraði sárgymir á sverða nesi;
 fell flóð fleina í fjöru Storðar.⁵⁸

Wound-fires [SWORDS] burned in bloody wounds; long-beards [SWORDS] swung down on men's lives. The wound-sea/Gymir [BLOOD] roared on the swords' headland [SHIELD]; a flood of shafts [BLOOD] fell on the foreshore of Stord.

Here the concept of blood as a roaring 'wound-sea/Gymir' probably alludes to the myth of the slaying of a primordial giant with a similar-sounding name, Ymir,⁵⁹ from whose wounds blood flowed to form the seas.⁶⁰

ON *gymir/Gymir* also appears in the unique term *hvergymir* 'cauldron/hot-spring sea/Gymir' in a skaldic poem from the late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century tale *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* 'Star-Oddi's Dream'.⁶¹ It forms part of the 'woman'-kenning *Hörn hvergymis stjörnu* 'Hörn [a

56 See below, however, for her partial namesake *Margerðr* 'Sea-Gerðr' (probably), one of nine ship-destroying, ship-robbing troll-women who may be identified as *hrannar* 'waves'.

57 See *LP* s.v. *gymir* 1; *PTP*, 392–3, 835.

58 Whaley, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 1, 182.

59 Cf. Sturtevant, 'Three Old Norse Words', 114.

60 This stanza flirts with an image of swords burning in a bloody, turbulent sea of giant-blood. We might compare how Beowulf's giant sword *forbarn* 'burnt up' (1616, 1667) in giant-blood in the waters of Grendel's mere, whose turbulent waves were themselves stained with such blood and similarly crashed against *naessas* 'headlands' (1358).

61 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 481. A. Andrén, 'Is it Possible to Date a Fornaldarsaga? The Case of *Star-Oddi's Dream*', in T. R. Tangherlini (ed.), *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions* (Berkeley, 2014), 173–83 at 182 dates the saga's composition to after 1404.

Freyja-alias, here denoting ‘goddess’] of the star of the cauldron-sea/Gymir [GOLD].⁶² It is presumably not coincidental that the woman is described in the immediately preceding stanza as the *ægis geisla* ... *Gerðr* ‘Gerðr of the rays of the sea/Ægir [GOLD]’.⁶³ The woman in question is a violent, trollish, wolf-headed, sea-faring female called *Hlégunnr* ‘Lee-Battle’. It is interesting to observe that, like *Hlégunnr*, Grendel’s mother was violent, trollish and lupine; that she was similarly beheaded by a sword; and that she too was associated with a golden, sun-like radiance within water (compare *hvergymis stjörnu* ‘star of the cauldron-sea’).

Hjálmpér, Ýma and Margerðr

If Gerðr’s father was closely associated with the sea, both Gerðr’s bower—which was within walking distance of his halls—and, ultimately at least, the *gambanteinn* were presumably also in the sea, or more specifically (it seems likely) in an island or other space enclosed or encroached upon by water.⁶⁴ Such a location offers further encouragement for the association of the *gambanteinn* with the giant sword, as the latter was found beneath the waters of a Danish bog, as have many swords in historical reality.⁶⁵

Further reason to think that Gerðr lived in proximity to the sea, and was sometimes immersed in water, is provided by *Hjálmpés saga*. Shortly after Hjálmpér’s encounter with Vargeisa, the saga refers to an encounter between the hero and his companions (chiefly Ölvir and the ‘slave’ Hörðr, who is eventually revealed as King Hringr, brother of Vargeisa/Ál(f)sól) on the one hand, and a radiant troll-woman and

62 *Hymiskviða* and the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* attest to the possession by Ægir (= Gymir in *Lokasenna*) of a huge *hverr/ketill* ‘cauldron’.

63 Andréen, ‘Is it Possible?’, 181–3 identifies *Hlégunnr* with the historical Queen Margarete of Denmark.

64 Cf., in Chapter 13 of this study, the swords on *Sigarshólmr* ‘Sigarr’s Island’.

65 See F. Battaglia, ‘Not Christianity versus Paganism, but Hall versus Bog: The Great Shift in Early Scandinavian Religion and its Implications for *Beowulf*’, in Kilpiö *et al.*, *Anglo-Saxons and the North*, 47–67 at 53; F. Herschend, *The Early Iron Age in South Scandinavia: Social Order in Settlement and Landscape* (Uppsala, 2009), 350. Among these swords are one from Nydam bearing what looks like a representation of a horned crescent moon; see *SASE*, 42; 53; C. Engelhardt, *Denmark in the Early Iron Age* (London, 1866), VII Nydam (fig. 22). In myth, recall also Excalibur, the marvellous sword—according to some accounts a flaming weapon—which King Arthur obtained from another supernatural aquatic female, the Lady of the Lake (whom some commentators connect with Diana, a Roman underworld goddess of the moon).

her sister Margerðr on the other. The name *Margerðr*, interpretable most obviously as ‘Sea-Gerðr’ (ON *marr* ‘sea’),⁶⁶ catches the eye, and the relevant episode merits examination here.⁶⁷

Chapter 11 of the saga records that Hjálmpér re-encountered his stepmother, Lúða, whom he had earlier rejected and punched. Now hideous, she cursed him. He would have no peace of mind, she declared, except when aboard ship or in his tent, until he saw a princess called Hervör Hundingsdóttir. Lúða presumably thought this an impossible task, but Hjálmpér took the challenge lightly. Before setting off, he said Lúða would lay no more spells on him, because *kjafr þinn skal opinn standa* ‘your mouth shall stand open’ while she straddled two crags by a harbour, above a fire kindled by slaves, and sustained only by what ravens brought her (presumably nothing), until he returned. These details resemble Skírnir’s threatened curse upon Gerðr in *För Skírnis* (27–8): if Gerðr does not accede to his wishes, she will reside as a spectacle on a hill of eagles, where she will find food loathsome (and therefore go hungry)—‘*Gapiðu grindum frá!*’ ‘Gape from the gates!’, Skírnir commands.⁶⁸

Hjálmpér and his companions set off on their quest to find Hervör, in which they eventually succeeded. Chapter 12 records how, along the way, they came one autumn to a big country with a large fjord and great mountains. Hjálmpér walked along the seashore. He saw a *tröllkonu stórskorna* ‘large-boned troll-woman’ standing amid a threateningly high mountain above a spring on the shore. She had a *gullofinn dúk* ‘gold-woven towel’ on her knees (the implication being that she was otherwise naked) and was combing her *ljósa lokka* ‘light/radiant locks’, which she had just washed, *gullkambi* ‘with a golden comb’. He addressed her in verse as a *bákn* ‘beacon’,⁶⁹ a term that suggests a highly visible fiery radiance, while at the same time declaring her the most hideous female on Earth. She, in turn, expressed disapproval at his speech and said he

66 On this name, see *PTP*, 730. Possible alternative or additional meanings are ‘Sword-Gerðr’ (*marr* being a term for ‘sword’ in *ibid.*, 794), ‘Horse-Gerðr’ (ON *marr* ‘horse’) and ‘(Night)mare-Gerðr’ (ON *mara* ‘(night)mare (monster)’). Cf. aspects of Vargeisa.

67 For the text, see *FSN*, IV, 203–13.

68 Cf. also the forced opening of the wolf Fenrir’s jaws (discussed in Chapter 10 of this study), the fate of the giantess Hríngerðr at a harbour (Chapter 13), and the yawning of the troll-woman Skjaldvör (Chapter 14).

69 Translated ‘monster’ in Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 504, but see the note thereto.

would be the first on her cooking fire. He retorted that the towel had an evil fate to be rubbing her hair and approaching her *glyrnum* ‘gleaming/cat’s eyes’. In a verse he also threatened *snerta* ‘to touch’ her with his sword *Snarvendill*, as a result of which she would *handar ... missa* ‘miss her hand’ and cry out loudly. He added that she was *skauð it aumasta* ‘the most touchy/miserable sheath/cunt’. Hjalmpér’s threat to ‘touch’ her is laden with sexual innuendo, which she answered by declaring an interest in *missa minn meydóm* ‘losing my virginity’ and having him *handtéra mik um mittit* ‘hand-stretch me around the middle’, because ‘it may well be that the grey beast I have between my legs is starting to yawn now and wants to be fondled’.⁷⁰ As she dipped her hand in the spring, Hjalmpér drew *Snarvendill* and severed it *í úlfliðnum* ‘in the wolf-joint [i.e., at the wrist]’. She screamed, gazed at the stump, and declared that ‘*Víst gleðr mik eitt ... jöfurr inn ógndjarfi*’ ‘“one thing certainly gladdens me ... O fearless boar”’ – her sisters were busy making corpses of his men back on the ships.

Hjalmpér then saw that nine large troll-women had broken the men’s ships to pieces,⁷¹ killed the crew and brought all their goods ashore.⁷² These monsters had heard everything that he and the radiant troll-woman, *Ýma* (*Íma*) ‘Embers’,⁷³ had said. The nine were called *Hergunnr* ‘War-Battle’, *Hremsa* ‘Paw/Claw’ (or ‘Clutch’ or ‘Shaft’), *Nál* ‘Needle’, *Neffa* ‘Nose’, *Rúna* ‘Intimate Friend’ (or *Raun* ‘Trial’), *Trana* ‘Snout’, *Greip* ‘Grip’, *Glyrna* ‘Glowing/Cat’s Eye’ and *Margerðr*.

70 O’Connor, *Icelandic Histories*, 81. I lack the Norse wording for this passage, which perhaps fell victim to censorship in most manuscripts of the saga.

71 As with *Vargeisa* earlier, compare the ship-destroying *vargynjur* of *Hárbarðsljóð* 37–9. Cf. also the nine daughters of *Ægir*, personifications of waves.

72 Note that they are robbers.

73 The *rimur* have *Íma*. Given her radiance, I favour the translation ‘Embers’ (from *ím* ‘dust, ashes, embers’; see CV s.v. *íma*, *ím*, *Ýma*) over ‘Dark/Dusky One’ (for which see Gade and Marold, *Treatises from Poetics*, 728), although since I believe she is, or was originally, a lunar giantess, it would be fitting if she also had a dark aspect. Another list of names of troll-women includes *Íma* beside *Imð* (and *Járnsaxa* ‘Iron Knife’); see *SnESkald*, I, 112; Gade and Marold, *Treatises from Poetics*, 727. Similar-looking names appear elsewhere, at least sometimes denoting giants. A certain *Imð(r)* appears in stanza 43 of the Eddic *Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* ‘First Poem of Helgi, Slayer of Hundingr’; one of the god *Heimdallr*’s nine giant-mothers (quite possibly personified waves) bears the same name in *Hyndluljóð* 37 (another is *Járnsaxa*). *Vafþrúðnismál* 5 mentions a male giant called *Ímr*. An obscure late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century runic inscription from Bergen, Norway twice refers to a certain *Ími*; McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 133; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, 129; M. P. Barnes, *Runes: A Handbook* (Woodbridge, 2012), 111.

All nine were scantily clad, their jaws gaped (*göptu kjöftunum*), and they shook their heads. Margerðr evidently stood out, though, as she walked in front and is individually described. She was a hunchback with a single eye in the middle of her forehead—a significant combination suggestive, in my view, of a gibbous moon.⁷⁴ She also had a nose and claws of iron, two overhanging teeth and a lower lip that hung down to her chest. Hjalmpér suspected she could give a powerful kiss!

He turned back to the men's tent, which the nine troll-women then made for with the intention of cooking the men. Verses were spoken, in which Hjalmpér identified the foes as *Hrauðungs meyjar* 'Hrauðungr's girls' and possibly as *hrannar* 'waves'.⁷⁵ Ölvir also referred to them obliquely in the phrase *hverja hýsnoppu* 'every downy-snouted girl'. Hergunnr then threatened Hjalmpér, whom she too called a *jöfurr* 'boar', by showing him her claws with their uncut nails and insinuating sexual violence. He replied by urging her to advance and:

'Ettu fram járnhrömmum, ef þú afli treystir,
drós in dulrifa, en ek mun dvergasmíði.'

'Stretch forth your iron claws, if you trust your strength, wilful(?) girl [or 'girl of concealed ripping(?)'],⁷⁶ and I will (unleash) dwarves' work [i.e., Snarvendill]!⁷⁷

Hörðr fought and killed seven of the troll-women. Hjalmpér fought a long battle with Hergunnr, who defended herself with a *vænt sax* 'beautiful short-sword', until she tired and called for help from Margerðr, *mær in öflgasta* 'the most powerful maiden'. She and Margerðr fled, but Hörðr gave chase. He beheaded Hergunnr and then cut Margerðr in half at the waist. He had then killed all nine sisters.⁷⁸

74 See further Chapter 14, which discusses another gibbous giant, Kolr.

75 Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, 508–9 thinks this interpretation 'remotely possible' as an allusion to 'waves as the daughters of the sea-giant Ægir'. I think it likely.

76 Possibly an allusion to retractable claws.

77 Cf. my earlier comparison, in Chapter 5, of Grendel's steely taloned arm, which may be described as an 'un/bad-sword', with the giant sword.

78 Similarly Beowulf slew with his sword nine water-monsters in *egstreamum* 'sea-streams' (574–7) after an encounter with a gripping water-monster (a prefigurement of Grendel's mother), which he killed with the point of his sword (553–8). OE *eg-* and *eagor-* (in *eagorstream* 'sea-stream' 513) are cognate with ON *Ægir*, the sea-giant whose nine daughters are waves. Cf. Battaglia, 'Germanic Earth Goddess', 428, 441 n. 3.

Subsequently we re-encounter Ýma, who has not been killed, in the company of a pitchfork-bearing giant. Hördör killed him as well, but spared Ýma. He put her in charge of the giant's cave, which was full of gold and other treasure, some of which he took. Ýma told him to call her name if he ever needed help.⁷⁹ I return to Ýma and her male companion in Chapter 14, but here we should note the similarities between these events and those of *För Skírnis* and Hjálmpér's encounter with Vargeisa.

The likelihood that the Eddic poem's Gerðr is a giantess associated with the sea is increased by the presence in the saga of *Margerðr* 'Sea-Gerðr', whose potentially lunar aspect encourages attribution of the same to Gerðr. And although Gerðr's radiant beauty is not reflected in *Margerðr*'s hideous deformity, the saga-episode displays further significant similarities to *För Skírnis*, if we allow for some distortion, duplication and displacement. For Gerðr finds a clearer parallel, except by name, in Ýma, *Margerðr*'s sister and likely original double, whom Hjálmpér encountered on the shore.⁸⁰

Gerðr is characterized by an alluring radiance, which, as we shall later find further evidence to suspect, is probably lunar, although as a forthright frost-giant she is also off-putting and decidedly hostile. Similarly, Ýma is in one respect a golden, latently lustrous beacon, but at the same time hideous and potentially deadly. As such, she too evinces the double aspect of the common medieval concept of the 'loathly lady', which we have also seen in *Vargeisa/Ál(f)sól*.⁸¹

Hjálmpér, for his part, corresponds broadly to Skírnir, who, we have seen, parallels Beowulf. The son of Ingi, Hjálmpér is figuratively the supreme 'boar', a boar being one of Freyr's close animal associates. And rather as Skírnir is impelled to seek Gerðr for Freyr by the implicit 'cursing' of his master by love at first sight, so Hjálmpér is cursed to seek Hervör, whom Hördör/Hringr will eventually marry. Furthermore, Hjálmpér's encounter with Ýma finds broad parallel in Skírnir's

79 Ellis, 'Fostering by Giants', 73 observes: 'The incident with her [i.e., Ýma] is ... completely irrelevant and quite unnecessary to the plot; and therefore on the face of it more likely to be earlier, half-remembered material'.

80 Note the appearance of *Ímgerðr* and *Margerðr* in the same stanza of a verse catalogue of the names of troll-women in *SnESkald*, I, 112.

81 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas* 25 (1957), 3–24 at 19 thinks the 'loathly lady' motif entered Icelandic tradition from early Celtic stories of the British Isles. See also on this theme, L. Motz, *The Beauty and the Hag: Female Figures of Germanic Faith and Myth* (Wien, 1993).

encounter with Gerðr. In both cases, the male sees a radiant giantess or troll-woman (effectively the same thing). As a visitor to her land he addresses her with hostile verses and threatens her with a marvellous sword, whereupon she agrees to sex (though the saga-episode makes no reference to runes). In the saga, Hjálmpér's severing of Ýma's wrist and her crying out are probably euphemisms for sexual penetration and orgasm.

Significant, too, are parallels between Ýma and Vargeisa, who also appear to be essentially doubles. Both are large-mouthed 'ember'-monstrosities whom Hjálmpér encounters in the autumn by the shore. Both are daughters of Hrauðungr. Both are initially dangerous but ultimately won over. Both are also wolfish, temporary custodians of Snarvendill (assuming Hjálmpér's sword penetrates Ýma sexually), and concomitantly lustful for the same hero. As a counterpart to Vargeisa's wolfish aspect, the 'grey beast' between Ýma's legs strongly suggests not just her 'pussy' but a wolf,⁸² in this case a sexually ravenous one; it is surely no coincidence that a list of Old Norse poetic terms for *ylgr* 'she-wolf' includes, beside *vargynja*, *íma* (= *ýma*).⁸³ And rather as Ýma's 'sheath', effectively her lower mouth, implicitly stretched like a scabbard to receive Snarvendill, so Vargeisa played vigorously with Snarvendill using her hands and 'mouth'—a description that now looks even more like masturbatory euphemism.⁸⁴

These parallels bring into focus neglected aspects of Grendel's mother. Like both Vargeisa and Ýma, Grendel's mother was a lupine giantess, probably latently hot and (ultimately) radiant, who dwelt in a space in proximity to water. She too was greedy for a sword. She too was probably a thief or at least a receiver of stolen or arrogated goods. A clawing man eater, she too was hungry for a 'boar'-warrior, the son of an Ing-character—in her case the boar-helmeted Beowulf (1448–54), the

82 As noted earlier, *ímleitr* 'ember/ash-coloured' describes a wolf.

83 See *PTP*, 905.

84 See Chapter 3. The implicit stretching of Ýma's wolfish vagina ('sheath, scabbard') by a sword might be informed by the myth of the propping open of Fenrir's jaws by a sword—which, I later suggest, he subsequently swallowed—after he had bitten off the hand of the god Týr (see Chapter 10). Hjálmpér's severing of Ýma's hand at the 'wolf-joint' might allude to this myth, though here it is the 'wolf' who is dismembered. As Ýma's lupine *vagina dentata* implicitly threatens to sever the blade of Snarvendill, we might, as with Vargeisa's sword-swallowing, compare the possible sexual connotations of the melting of the giant sword's blade after beheading Grendel's mother.

surrogate champion of the 'Ing-friends' who would become Hroðgar's adopted son. She too had temporary possession of a radiant sword, the giant sword, which, after a tussle, the same boar-warrior departed with. And finally, as we shall see later in this study, she, like Margerðr and Gerðr, may well have had a lunar aspect.

The Burning Candle and the Barley Isle

Distantly related to the union of Freyr and Gerðr on *Barri* in *För Skírnis* (*Barey* in *Gylfaginning*), and to the intimated image of the giant sword as a burning candle in *Beowulf*, might be a ritual described by a late twelfth- or thirteenth-century reviser of the twelfth-century *Historia monasterii de Abingdon* (also known as the *Historia ecclesiae Abbendonensis* 'History of the Church of Abingdon'). This text records the miraculous way in which, during the reign of King Edmund (941–6), the monks of Abingdon monastery settled a dispute with the locals of Oxford over the ownership of *quodam prato nomine Beri* 'a certain meadow by the name of Beri':

Quod dum servi Dei propensius actitarent, inspiratum est eis salubre consilium, et (ut pium est credere,) divinitus provisum. Die etenim statuto mane surgentes monachi sumpserunt scutum rotundum, cui imponebant manipulum frumenti, et super manipulum cereum circumspectæ quantitatis et grossitudinis. Quo accenso, scutum cum manipulo et cereo, fluvio ecclesiam prætercurrenti committunt, paucis in navicula fratribus subsequentibus. Præcedebat itaque eos scutum et quasi digito demonstrans possessiones domui Abbendonæ de jure adjacentes, nunc huc, nunc illus divertens; nunc in dextra, nunc in sinistra parte fiducialiter eos præibat, usquedum veniret ad rivum prope pratum quod Beri vocatur, in quo cereus medium cursum Tamisæ miraculose deserens se declinavit et circumdedit pratum inter Tamisiam et Gifteleia, quod hieme et multociens æstate ex redundatione Tamisæ in modum insulæ aqua circumdatur. Quo viso miraculo ab astantibus, et concurrentibus tam Berrocensis pagi quam Oxenfordensis nonnullis comprovincialibus, insimil et monachis cereum sequentibus, memoratum pratum domui Abbendonæ est redditum, populo acclamante, 'Jus Abbendonæ, jus Abbendonæ!' Ex hoc etiam miraculo omnes qui illud audierant tantus stupor invaserat, ut ab illo tempore usque ad præsens tempus non esset inventus quispiam rex, vel dux, vel princeps,

vel aliquis alius præpotens, qui de eodem prato contra domum Abbendoniz causam movere aliquatenus auderet.⁸⁵

While the servants of God were most eagerly pleading this [i.e., that God would show the justness of their case], they were inspired by a wholesome plan, and (it is pious to believe) a divinely provided one. Indeed, on the appointed day, the monks arose in the morning and took a round shield, on which they placed a bundle of grain/crops, and upon the bundle a wax candle of well-considered/distinguished size and thickness. Having lit it, they committed the shield with the bundle and candle to the river flowing past the church, with a few brothers following in a small boat. Thus the shield preceded them and, like a finger, pointed out the adjacent possessions of the house of Abingdon by legal right, turning now here, now there; now to the right, now to the left side it faithfully preceded them, until it came to a stream by a meadow which is called Beri, at which point the candle, miraculously deserting the middle course of the Thames, turned aside and passed around the meadow between the Thames and Iffley, which in winter and many times in summer is surrounded by the overflowing of the Thames with water in the manner of an island. When this miracle had been seen by those standing there and by those running alongside, both of the district of Berkshire and some of the natives of Oxford, and likewise by the monks following the candle, the said meadow was given back to the house of Abingdon, with the people crying 'Abingdon's (legal) right, Abingdon's right!' Furthermore, all who have heard of this miracle have been struck with such astonishment that, from that time until the present time, no king or duke or prince or other very powerful person has been found who would to any extent dare bring a case against the house of Abingdon concerning the same meadow.

Various scholars have discussed parallels between this episode and the description of the arrival and departure of *Scyld Scefing* 'Shield (son) of (the) Sheaf' at the start of *Beowulf*.⁸⁶ It seems likely that these accounts, and others, derive from an early Germanic fertility myth concerning a barley-spirit. One scholar also points out a possible parallel between the water-meadow called *Beri*, interpreted as 'Barley Isle', in the chronicle

85 Rev. J. Stevenson (ed.), *Chronicon monasterii de Abingdon*, 2 vols (London, 1858), I, 89–90; for a modern edition with translation, see J. Hudson (ed. and trans.), *Historia Ecclesie Abbendonensis: The History of the Church of Abingdon*, 2 vols (Oxford, 2002–7), I, 284–7.

86 E.g., Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction*, 83–4, 302–3; Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 11, 14, 22–3; HG, 189–91; Bruce, *Scyld and Scef*, 170–2 n. 43; Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, 265–9.

and the *Barri/Barey* of Norse tradition.⁸⁷ Additionally, I tentatively suggest that the giant sword—which, we have seen, could well be akin to Skírnir's *gambanteinn* and implicitly imagined as a large, burning candle—shares a degree of kinship, albeit indistinctly, with the chronicle's 'wax candle of well-considered/distinguished size and thickness'.⁸⁸ It is, at least, curious that rather like the monks' candle, the giant sword passed through waters in close association with a representative of both barley and shield: Beowulf, whose name is interpretable as *Beow-wulf* 'Barley-Wolf', and who fought as the effective champion of the *Scyldingas* 'Shieldings'. Also, rather as the monks' candle, by serving as God's finger and overcoming the neighbours' claim, returned to Abingdon monastery land enclosed by water, so the giant sword, by serving as an extension of Beowulf's arm and overcoming the Danes' unjust neighbours, effectively returned to Heorot the mere, its contents and environs, according to divine right.

87 Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode', 14.

88 The candle's placement on a likely sheaf of barley is also suggestive of a sexual symbolism in keeping with the union of the grain-god Freyr with Gerðr. For its part, the round shield of the chronicle might represent the sun. In Chapter 14 of this study, though, we shall meet a family of lunar 'shield'-giants comparable with Gerðr and Grendel's mother. Anlezark, *Water and Fire*, 289 n. 96 compares the monks' candle to the golden standard in Scyld's funeral ship, which, in Chapter 4, I likened to the giant sword as candle.

8. Lævateinn and the Maelstrom-Giantess

The possibility—I think probability—of a kinship between Skírnir’s *gambanteinn* and Beowulf’s submerged giant sword is underlined by another Eddic composition, *Svipdagsmál*, which bears strong similarities to *För Skírnis* and the quest for Hervör in *Hjálmþés saga*. It mentions a remarkable *teinn*-weapon, probably radiant and comparable to Skírnir’s *gambanteinn*. This weapon, called Lævateinn, seems to have been stolen by Loki and concealed at the bottom of a mighty whirlpool, where it was guarded by a pale giantess suggestive of Grendel’s mother. If this is the case, *Svipdagsmál* lends comparative support to the idea that the giant sword of *Beowulf* had similarly been stolen and submerged by Grendel and then guarded by his mother. This chapter therefore examines *Svipdagsmál*, investigates the nature of the Lævateinn, highlights similarities with other texts and weapons, and adduces further instances of Old Norse whirlpool-giantesses, before returning to Grendel’s mother.

Svipdagr’s Quest for Menglǫð

Svipdagsmál is the modern name for two Old Norse Eddic poems, *Grógaldr* ‘Gróa’s Incantation’ and *Fjölsvinnsmál* ‘The Lay of Fjölsvinnr’, which appear narratively linked. They survive only in seventeenth-century manuscripts, but it is thought probable that they were composed in the twelfth century;¹ in common with other texts examined in this book, they may contain still older mythic themes and images.

1 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ‘Svipdag’s Long Journey: Some Observations on *Grógaldr* and *Fjölsvinnsmál*’, *Béaloideas* 39/41 (1971–3), 98–319 at 306.

The Icelandic scholar Einar Ólafur Sveinsson took the view that ‘in general there is not a great deal of directly mythical material in the poems [*Grógaldr* and *Fjolsvinnsmál*]. There may be something at the back of them; but that is another story,’ and added that ‘a mythical element may be sought for *Svipdagsmál*; but if it exists, it is not obvious.’² I believe there is such an element, that it is indeed not obvious, but that close study of *Svipdagsmál* and its analogues can uncover at least some of it.

In *Grógaldr* we meet the hero *Svipdagr*—he is anonymous in this poem, but his name is revealed near the end of *Fjolsvinnsmál*.³ He received an apparently impossible task from *in lævísa kona* ‘the crafty/treacherous woman’ who had embraced his father (evidently his evil stepmother): *Svipdagr* must visit an inaccessible woman called *Menglǫð* ‘Necklace-Glad’,⁴ who is subsequently identified as the daughter of a son of a certain *Svafrþorinn* ‘Sleep-Bold One(?)’; her name might suggest Freyja wearing her cherished *Brísingamen*, an object that seems to have been considered an aid to childbirth,⁵ as *Menglǫð* herself may have been (*Fjolsvinnsmál* 8, 35–40; cf. 22); it will be recalled, though, that *Gerðr* was also satisfied with her gold. *Svipdagr* is destined not only to find *Menglǫð* but to marry her.

First, he went to the grave of his birth mother, *Gróa* ‘Growing One’ (an earth-goddess?),⁶ to ask her for incantations to help him on his quest, for which he otherwise thought himself too young an *afi* ‘heir(?)’ to undertake.⁷ She recited nine (*Grógaldr* 6–14). The first was for the will to shrug off fear; the second for safety when travelling on roads; the third to send two dangerous falling rivers to Hel and make them decrease; the fourth to pacify enemies; the fifth to release a fetter from his limbs; the sixth to ensure a calm sea *í lúðr* ‘in a mill(-frame)’;⁸ the seventh to survive frost on a mountain; the eighth to avoid harm from

2 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ‘*Svipdag*’s Long Journey’, 305.

3 I explain his name in Chapter 16. Quotations from *Svipdagsmál* are adapted from P. M. W. Robinson, ‘An Edition of *Svipdagsmál*’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1991), principally from the emended text therein.

4 In the previous chapter we saw how *Hjálmpér* was similarly cursed by his crafty stepmother, *Lúða*, to find the hard-to-access *Hervör Hundingsdóttir*.

5 A. Meaney, ‘Drift Seeds and the *Brísingamen*’, *Folklore* 94 (1983), 33–9.

6 *Gróa* is also attested as the name of a sorceress who chanted helpful spells over Þórr, and as a sword-name; see *SnESkald*, I, 22, 118; *PTP*, 790–1.

7 The same word describes *Freyr* in *För Skírnis* 1, 2; *Hjálmpér* is similarly an *arfi* ‘heir’. Note also the *arfi* ‘heir’ of *Sólarljóð* 78 (discussed in Chapter 13).

8 I explain this phrase below.

a dead Christian woman by night on a misty road; the ninth in case he had to exchange words with *inn naddgöfga jötunn* ‘the nail-noble giant’, possibly the *Mimi/Mími* whose world-tree is mentioned shortly.⁹

These spells presumably offer clues to the perils Svipdagr faced on his journey, but which are never described, perhaps because Gróa’s spells enabled him to overcome them without incident. The frosty mountain and the Hel-bound streams may find parallel in the wet mountains that Skírnir traverses in *För Skírnis* and the mountain-stream that passes underground in Grendel’s frosty habitat (*Beowulf* 1359–61).

Fjolsvinnsmál starts abruptly. It picks up the story with Svipdagr standing *útan garða* ‘outside courts’ which lie within the walls of *pursa þjóðar sjöt* ‘the home(s) of the people of giants’. This may well make Menglǫð, who has authority over the place and its treasure-halls, a giantess—like *Gerðr* of Gyimir’s *garðar*. Outside, Svipdagr encountered a certain *Fjolsviðr* ‘Very Wise’,¹⁰ who dwelt by *hættan loga* ‘perilous flame’ and whom he insulted by calling him a *flagð* ‘giantess’ (1). The flame, which presumably surrounds Menglǫð’s hall, recalls the ‘discerning flicker-flame’ protecting *Gerðr*’s home in *För Skírnis* (see further below) and the fire on or in Grendel’s mere.

Fjolsviðr, an alleged ‘giantess’ who is probably a male *purs* ‘giant’, rebuffed Svipdagr—compare the unwelcoming herdsman of *För Skírnis* and his apparent counterpart in Grendel’s masculine *hyrde* ‘herdsman’ of a mother. But Svipdagr persisted and expressed his eagerness to get inside, having perceived the courts *glóa* ‘glowing’ around *gollna sali* ‘golden halls’ (5); compare Freyr’s desire after seeing the radiant *Gerðr*.

Fjolsviðr asked Svipdagr his lineage. Svipdagr replied that he was *Vindkaldr* ‘Wind-Cold’, son of *Várkaldr* ‘Spring-Cold’, son of *Fjolkaldr* ‘Very Cold’ (6); compare Skírnir’s evasiveness about his identity.

Svipdagr then engaged the giant in deeper conversation. He learned, among other things, that the castle’s gate was made by the sons of *Sólblindi* ‘Sun-Blind/Hidden’ (10), who are probably dwarves,¹¹ and that the formidably walled castle was guarded by two dogs, who took alternate day and night shifts (13–6); compare the guard-dogs outside *Gerðr*’s home and the wolves around, and minor creatures within,

9 *Mimi/Mími* might be a variant of the better-known *Mímir*; see C. Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 2 vols (Helsinki, 2009), I, 322.

10 *Fjolsviðr* and *Fjolsvinnr* are variants of the same name.

11 Robinson, ‘Edition’, 109.

Grendel's mere. The only way Svipdagr could enter the stronghold was to distract these dogs by feeding them titbits from a certain *Viðófnir* 'Wood/Tree-Crier/Crower(?)' (18),¹² later identified as a cockerel.

Next Svipdagr asked about the tree whose branches stretch across all lands. Fjølsviðr identified it as *Mímameiðr* (or *Mímameiðr*) 'Mimi's (or Mími's) Tree', which neither fire nor iron can harm, and whose burnt fruit acts as an abortifacient (20–2).

Ten subsequent stanzas contain key points of interest, albeit rather difficult to access:

Svipdagr:

'Segðu mér þat, Fjølsviðr, er ek þik fregna mun,
ok ek vilda vita:
hvat sá hani heitir, er sitr í inum háva viði —
allr hann við gull glóir.'

Fjølsviðr:

'Viðófnir hann heitir, en hann stendr Veðrglasi¹³ á,
meiðs kvistum Míma;
einum ekka þrøngr hann ørófsaman
Surtar¹⁴ *Sinnmǫru*.¹⁵

Svipdagr:

'Segðu mér þat, Fjølsviðr, er ek þik fregna mun,
ok ek vilda vita:
hvárt sé vǫpna nǫkkut, þat er knegi Viðófnir fyrir
hníga á Heljar sǫt?'

12 For other interpretations of this name, see *PTP*, 948–9.

13 Emendation of *veðirglasi*.

14 Robinson emends *sútr* 'with anguish'. He states: 'No sense can be made of *surtar* (or *surtir*), and no place can be found for Surtir in the narrative in the following stanzas' (124). Although *Surtr* 'Black One', an apocalyptic fire-giant, plays no further part in this poem, I disagree that a reference to him makes no sense here. Since *Sinnmara* guards a sunken treasure, it may be relevant that *Surtr* is associated with *sǫkkdalir* 'sunken/treasure(?) dales' in the tenth-century *Háleygjatal* 'Tally of the Háleygir [i.e., people of Hálogaland]' by the Norwegian Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson; see Whaley, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1*, 197–8; R. Poole, 'Myth and Ritual in the *Háleygjatal* of Eyvindr Skáldaspillir', in Quinn, Heslop and Wills, *Learning and Understanding*, 153–76 at 157–61.

15 Emendation of *sinn mautu* and *sinn mantu*.

Fjølsviðr:

'Lævateinn¹⁶ heitir, en hann gærði Loptr rúinn,¹⁷
fyr nágrindr neðan;
í segjárns keru liggir hann hjá *Sinnmǫru*,
ok halda njarðlásar níu.'

Svipdagr:

'Segðu mér þat, Fjølsviðr, er ek þik fregna mun,
ok ek vilda vita:
hvárt aptr kemr, sá er eptir ferr
ok vill þann tein taka.'

Fjølsviðr:

'Aptr mun koma, sá er eptir ferr
ok vill þann tein taka,
ef þat færir sem fáir eigu
eiri Aurglasis.'

Svipdagr:

'Segðu mér þat, Fjølsviðr, er ek þik fregna mun,
ok ek vilda vita:
hvárt sé mæta nokkut, þat er menn hafi,
ok verðr því in fólva gýgr fegin.'

Fjølsviðr:

'Ljósan ljá skaltu í lúðr bera,
þann er liggir í Viðófnis vølum,
Sinnmǫru at selja, áðr hon sǫm telisk
vápn til vígs at ljá.'

Svipdagr:

'Segðu mér þat, Fjølsviðr, er ek þik fregna mun,
ok ek vilda vita:
hvat sá salr heitir, er slunginn er
vísuðm vafroga?'

16 Emendation of *Hevatein*, for alliteration.

17 Robinson emends *rifinn* 'plucked'.

Fjølsviðr:

‘Lýr hann heitir, en hann lengi mun
 á brodds oddi bifask;
 auðranns þess munu um aldr hafa
 frétt eina firar.’¹⁸ (23–32)

Svipdagr:

‘Tell me that, Fjølsviðr, which I will ask you, and which I would know: what the cockerel is called which sits in the high tree—he is all glowing with gold.’

Fjølsviðr:

‘Viðófnir he is called, and he stands on *Veðrglasir* “Weather/Wether-Gleaming”, on the branches of Mimi’s tree; with one sorrow he oppresses *Surtr*’s “Black One’s” *Sinmara* “Sinew/Perpetual/Great(?) (Night)mare”¹⁹ immeasurably.’

Svipdagr:

‘Tell me that, Fjølsviðr, which I will ask you, and which I would know: whether there is any weapon which can cause Viðófnir to sink down to Hel’s dwellings.’

Fjølsviðr:

‘*Lævateinn* “Twig of Treacheries/Evils(?)” it is called—and *Loptr* “Lofty/Airy” had plucked it—beneath corpse-gates; it lies in a chest of tough-iron besides *Sinmara*, and nine *Njörðr*-locks²⁰ guard it.’

Svipdagr:

‘Tell me that, Fjølsviðr, which I will ask you, and which I would know: whether he will come back, the one who goes after (it) and wants to take that twig.’

18 Adapted from Robinson, ‘Edition’, 75–8.

19 ON *sin* means ‘sinew(s)’, but I am inclined to explain *sin-* here by reference to OE *sin-* ‘perpetual/continual’ or ‘great’, as seen, for instance, in OE *sinnihite* ‘perpetual night’ (*Beowulf* 161) and *sinfrea* ‘great lord’ (*Beowulf* 1934). Cf. A. Zavaroni, ‘Mead and *Aqua Vitae*: Functions of Mimir, Óðinn, Viðófnir and Svipdagr’, *ABüG* 61 (2006), 65–86 at 72. On the type of monster called a *mara* ‘mare’ in Old Norse, see later in this chapter.

20 A notable detail, as *Njörðr* was not only a sea-god but Freyr’s father. If Svipdagr is equatable with Freyr/Skírnir, the poem may be hinting that his rightful inheritance lies within. In Chapter 13, I suggest a link with the nine daughters of *Njörðr* who inscribed runes on a solar antler.

Fjolsviðr:

'He will come back, the one who goes after (it) and wants to take that twig, if he brings that which few possess to the Eir [i.e., goddess = Sinmara] of *Aurglasir* "Mud-Shining".'

Svipdagr:

'Tell me that, Fjolsviðr, which I will ask you, and which I would know: whether there is any treasure that men may obtain, with which the pale giantess [i.e., Sinmara] will be pleased.'

Fjolsviðr:

'A radiant sickle, the one in Viðófnir's joints/rods(?), you must carry into the "mill(-frame)", to give it to Sinmara, before she reckons herself willing to grant you the weapon for the killing.'

Svipdagr:

'Tell me that, Fjolsviðr, which I will ask you, and which I would know: what is the hall called, which is cast about with discerning flicker-flame?'

Fjolsviðr:

'*Lýr* "Pollack/Whitefish/Pike/Fish" it is called, and long will it tremble on the point of a spike;²¹ of this treasure-house, throughout the ages, men will have only hearsay.'

The *salr* 'hall' where Menglǫð dwells as ruler strongly resembles Gerðr's *salr* in that both are protected *vísun vafrröga* 'with discerning flicker-flame', both contain treasure and both shake (though not necessarily for the same reason). Assuming the emendation of the former hall's name from *Hýr* 'Fire' (also a 'sword'-term) or *Hýr* 'Pleasant' to *Lýr* in order to gain metrically required alliteration is correct,²² it may be, furthermore, that both halls were located in water, originally at least. Although previously *Lýr* has been interpreted as 'Shining One',²³ I propose a literal interpretation of the word, arguably with reference

21 Possibly the tip of a spear or sword.

22 It was first proposed by Sophus Bugge and is accepted by Robinson, 'Edition'. Eysteinn Björnsson, 'Svipdagsmál: The Lays of Svipdag' (2001), <http://web.archive.org/web/20010604093914/http://www.hi.is/~eybjorn/ugm/svipdag2.html>, however, prints *Hýr*, but thinks the word should be *Hir* 'Sweet, Smiling, Mild', which he views as a reference to Valhöll.

23 *ANEW* s.v. *lýr* 2.

to the hall's original or alternative form, as the masculine noun *lýr(r)* 'pollack' or perhaps 'whitefish' or 'pike', a word which, at least in a skaldic context, may also bear the generalized sense 'fish'.²⁴ This word is related to Greek *λευκος* 'whitefish' and Latin *lucius* 'pike(?)', whence comes English 'luce' (a term for a pike, especially when fully grown), the etymological sense possibly being 'bright one'.²⁵ Although, at first sight, 'Pollack/Whitefish/Pike/Fish' might appear a most unlikely name for a hall within a walled, fire-enveloped stronghold, this impression changes if its occupant, Menglǫð, *in sólbjarta brúðr* 'the sun-bright bride', is, like Gerðr, a maiden of circumscribed heavenly radiance. For I shall later adduce an Old Norse story in which a marvellous sword, probably solar, is contained within the body of a pike,²⁶ as well as similar Finnish traditions that the sun was swallowed by a whitefish, pike or other fish; I shall also compare these traditions to Beowulf's encounter with Grendel's mother as sword-greedy 'sea-she-wolf'.²⁷ Furthermore, ON *lýr(r)* appears elsewhere in skaldic terms for 'sea', such as *lýbraut* 'lýr-way', *lýrgata* 'lýr-street' and *lýs bæ* 'lýr's farm/landed estate', several times within broader kennings for 'gold' imagined as the 'fire (or embers) of the sea', as in the case of *lýsheimr* 'lýr's home', *lýslóð* 'lýr-track', *lýteigr* 'lýr-field' and most strikingly *lýskáli* 'lýr-hall'.²⁸ This last term appears in an obscure, but suggestive, anonymous stanza-fragment from the c. 1250 *Third Grammatical Treatise* by the Icelander Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld:

Band gaf oss með endum
Ilmr lýskála bála.²⁹

The *Ilmr* ('Fragrant One') <goddess> [WOMAN] of the bale/funeral-fires of the *lýr*-hall gave us [me] a band with ends [NECKLACE/TORQUE?].

We also have grounds for thinking that Menglǫð lived at sea because, as we shall discover, Svipdagr probably reached her after passing beneath a maelstrom to acquire the twig-sword *Lævateinn*. In view of this

24 Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 187.

25 ANEW s.v. *lýr* 1 and *lýrr*, *lýr*; ÍO s.v. *lýr*, *lýrr* 1.

26 Not, however, one called a *lýr(r)*.

27 See Chapter 15.

28 See Meissner, *Kenningar*, 96–7; LP and CV s.v. *lýr*.

29 PTP, 554.

sword's apparent importance to Svipdagr's quest, and the trembling of Menglǫð's hall on the point of a weapon, it also catches the eye that in a list of poetic names for fish, *lýr* comes immediately after *sverðfiskr* 'sword-fish' (*Xiphias gladius*).³⁰

Fjǫlsviðr went on to list the names of the dwarves who built the interior of the castle, which was completed by *Dellingr* 'Descendant of Brightness' (34). Dellingr is identified in another Eddic poem, *Vafþrúðnismál* 'The Sayings of Vafþrúðnir' (25), as the father of *Dagr* 'Day'.

In response to further enquiries from Svipdagr, who sees the *þjóðmæra* 'most glorious' woman (Menglǫð) standing motionless on a cliff or mountain (35), Fjǫlsviðr goes on to identify the site as *Lyfjaberg* 'Mountain of Remedies', which heals all women who scale it of every affliction, even barrenness (36). He also mentions the nine maidens (personifications of waves?) who sit at Menglǫð's feet, the last of whom is *Aurboða* (38)—elsewhere the name of Gerðr's mother.

Svipdagr, it appears, is in an impossible situation. To enter the castle, he must distract the guard-dogs with titbits from the body of *Viðófnir*, the cockerel which can be killed only with a special weapon, *Lævateinn*.³¹ But he can access *Lævateinn* only by acquiring a shining sickle from the body of *Viðófnir*! Nevertheless, after hearing that Menglǫð was destined for him alone (42), Svipdagr revealed his true name and commanded that the gates to the stronghold be opened (43). Fjǫlsviðr then went to announce to Menglǫð the arrival of the *gest* 'guest' (compare *Skírnir* and *Beowulf* as guests), and to see whether she would welcome her visitor, given that the dogs welcomed him, the house had unlocked itself and he believed Svipdagr to be who he said he was (44). Menglǫð threatened to have Fjǫlsviðr hanged if he was lying, but after the young man revealed to her his true identity as Svipdagr son of *Sólbjartr* 'Sun-Bright' and reported that he had reached her over *vindkalda vegu* 'wind-cold ways' (47), she ecstatically embraced him as the man she had waited for *dægr ok daga* 'day after day' (49); the throes of longing that each of them had endured were over (50).

30 *SnESkald*, I, 126; PTP, 855–6.

31 This word is found only here, though Richard North argues for a reference to 'a *lævateinn*' in a corrupt passage of *Haustlǫng* 11; North, *Haustlǫng*, 48.

Loki's Taking of the Twig

From the story's unexpectedly swift resolution, the relevance of the quoted stanzas concerning Lævateinn is not immediately clear. It is not made clear that Svipdagr acquired this weapon, despite having learnt how to do so. It would, however, be extraordinary if the means of acquiring Lævateinn, having been described in such detail, were irrelevant to the story's conclusion. Also, we may presumably infer from the dogs' welcoming of Svipdagr, that he had acquired the necessary food for them, which he could only have done by using Lævateinn. Possibly, he had also used Lævateinn or the golden sickle to kill Sinmara.³²

Although no trip by the hero to acquire a remarkable twig or twig-sword is described in either *Svipdagsmál* or the later Danish ballad of *Ungen Svendal* (or *Ungen Sveidal*) 'Young Svendal', which gives a variant version of events,³³ the ballad does attribute its hero a remarkable fiery sword. This he received from his dead mother, along with, among other things, a horse and an exceptionally fast ship. She declares:

'Ieg skall giffue deg suerditt,
er harditt y drage-blod:
y-huor du rider igieemill [*v.l.* igiennom] mørkenn skuoff,
daa brinder hun som enn boeell.'³⁴

'I shall give you the sword which is hardened in dragon-blood: wherever you ride through a dark wood, then it burns like a fire.'

From this stanza it seems reasonable to infer that Svendal took his sword to a dark wood, where it burst into flame. As will become clear, this sword's fiery radiance in association with a wood is suggestive of Lævateinn. But in combination with the horse and ship, it calls to mind more especially

32 Puhvel, *Beowulf*, 31–2 observes that in Celtic tradition a sword of light guarded by a supernatural hag is often 'the object of a quest by a hero who on getting it through some ruse into his hand slays the owner with it'.

33 On the relationship of *Svipdagsmál* to ballad-tradition, see J. Harris, 'Edda and Ballad: *Svipdagsmál* and the Uses of Poetic Afterlife', in Tangherlini, *Nordic Mythologies*, 35–49. The name *Svendal* and its variants are thought to derive ultimately from *Svipdagr*.

34 S. Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, 10 vols (Copenhagen, 1853–1976), II, 240, stanza 15.

the sword (comparable to Hrunting) and horse which Skírnir received from Freyr, who also owned a marvellous ship.³⁵ The association of Svendal's sword with a wood raises the likelihood that it, like *Lævateinn* and *gambanteinn*, was a twig-sword. This strengthens the grounds for also comparing it to Hrunting, the implicitly radiant weapon whose nature as a twig-sword I reveal in Chapter 16. Other versions of the ballad describe Svendal's sword as *det goede suerd* 'the good sword' and the *sverd saa got* 'sword so good', and name it *Adelring* 'Noble Ring'.³⁶ This name indicates that it had a ring attached to its hilt or was otherwise marked with a ring, like Hrunting and the *god* 'good' giant sword. Additionally, one version of the ballad describes the hero subsequently riding *offuer det brede haff / och gienem de grene skoffue ... offuer det vilde haff / och gienem de mørche skouffue* 'over the broad sea and through the green wood ... over the wild sea and through the dark wood'.³⁷ Perhaps we may compare Skírnir's journey to a wood to get the *gambanteinn*.³⁸

Whether or not Svipdagr did acquire *Lævateinn*, its nature, plucking and location are important to this study. Previously, this weapon has been assumed to be a sword. It probably is, but given the preceding reference to the *meiðs kvistum Mima* 'branches of Mimi's tree' (the tree evidently being a world-tree), a fundamental basis as a *teinn* 'twig' seems likely, as it does for the *gambanteinn*. Here the meaning of the passage *Lævateinn heitir, en hann gærði Loptr rúinn, fyr nágrindr neðan* is crucial. *Loptr* is an alias of Loki meaning 'Lofty', 'Airy' (from ON *lopt* 'air', 'sky').³⁹ Its use here suggests an airy setting, in keeping with the taking of a twig from a branch of the towering world-tree. Although it possibly was *fyr nágrindr neðan* 'below corpse-gates'⁴⁰—that is, 'in

35 Freyr's ship was *Skíðblaðnir*; *SnEGylf*, 36. Óðinn, who may also be connected with Svipdagr, owned the same ship, or at least a ship with the same name.

36 Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, 245–6.

37 Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, 245.

38 Note also the description of Svipdagr's partial namesake, the mythical Swedish King *Dagr* 'Day' (a likely euhemerization of Freyr), as *valteins ... sprakfrømuðr* 'the wise-advancer of the slaughter-twig [SWORD]' in Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 35–6 (see further Chapter 14). As we have seen, Freyr's sword, which required a wise owner, appears comparable to Hrunting, which I later identify as another twig-sword.

39 Loki flies, using Freyja's feather-skin, in *Drymskviða*. Another myth records that he turned himself into a fly to disrupt a dwarf's forging of treasures for the gods; *SnESkald*, I, 41–2.

40 The same phrase appears in the context of events *á viðar rótum* 'at the roots of the (world-)tree' in *För Skírnis* 35.

Hel', the subterranean land of the dead—that Loki plucked the twig, it seems questionable whether a character here explicitly identified as 'Airy' would have plucked it underground. Rather, I interpret the words *Lævateinn heitir* and *fyr nágrindr neðan* together as 'It is called Lævateinn below corpse-gates', with *en hann gørði Loptr rúinn* being a parenthesis perhaps illuminating the weapon's name on the basis of Loki's widespread association with *læ* 'treachery', 'harm'.⁴¹ Alternatively, it might be that the phrase *gørði rúinn* succinctly expresses both the plucking of a twig from a mid-air branch and its subsequent removal to a place below corpse-gates.

If Loki did pluck a twig from a mid-air branch of Mimi's tree, it is likely to have been a radiant twig, as the name *Veðrglasir* 'We(a)ther-Gleaming' apparently describes either this tree or one of its branches.⁴² And if Sinmara's home contained a radiant twig, this could explain why that place was called *Aurglasir* 'Mud-Shining'.

Other evidence also points to Lævateinn being a twig of heavenly light, most likely fiery—probably a symbol of a sunbeam. Loki was closely associated with fire. In *Gylfaginning* he competes commendably against *Logi* 'Flame', a personification of fire.⁴³ At Ragnarøk he is allied with the fire-giant Surtr. Additionally, Loki's taking of a twig-weapon from Mimi's tree may parallel Prometheus' theft of heavenly fire from

41 Cf. e.g., *inn lævisi Loki* 'the treachery-wise Loki' in *Lokasenna* 54. 'Twig of Treacheries/Harms/Evil Crafts' seems the most likely interpretation of *Lævateinn* (cf. Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 55). It may identify Lævateinn as the subject of repeated treachery; or as a weapon which betrays its possessor(s) (as the giant sword killed Grendel and his mother); or as one which punishes treacheries; or as one which causes harm; or as one which is the subject of harm (or some or all of these possibilities). Additionally, it calls to mind the *sviga lævi* 'fraud/treason/bane of switches' wielded by Surtr in *Völuspá* (see Chapter 9), Surtr being the apocalyptic fire-giant identified as Sinmara's possessor in *Fjölsvinnsmál* 24. It may be worth adding that, in view of Lævateinn's likely presence beneath the sea, a pun on ON *læ, lá* 'sea, surf' may be entertained. If wordplay is present, note also the *lé* 'sickle' required by Sinmara if she was to relinquish Lævateinn. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Svipdag's Long Journey', 301 offers yet another interpretation of the weapon's name, but without comment: 'wand of non-deceit'.

42 The interpretation 'Wether-Gleaming' is defensible on the basis that the world-tree is elsewhere identified with *Heimdallr* 'World-Tree', the white ram-god. His wool may have been equated with twigs, rather as the hair of the giant Ymir became the world's trees; cf. Chapter 10 n. 146. This could explain the use of *rúinn*, past participle of *rýja* 'to pluck wool from sheep', to describe Loki's taking of the twig.

43 *SnEGylf*, 40, 43.

Zeus by concealing it in a stalk of giant fennel, especially as scholars have drawn other parallels between Loki and the Greek Titan.⁴⁴

Svipdagsmál does not reveal why Loki took Lævateinn from the world-tree. But that its taking was a crime seems highly likely, not just because of the parallel with Prometheus' theft. Loki was notorious for larceny. Snorri describes him as *þjófr jötna, hafrs ok Brisingamens ok Iðunnar epla* 'thief of [i.e., for] giants, of a goat and of Brisingamen and of Iðunn's apples'.⁴⁵ It was also Loki who caused Þórr to set out to meet the giant Geirröðr without his weaponry,⁴⁶ though it is unclear whether on that occasion he stole Þórr's equipment or simply duped him into travelling unarmed. As 'thief of giants', Loki is probably complicit in the theft of Þórr's hammer, as *Þrymskviða* gives the impression that he knew immediately that Mjöllnir was in Þrymr's possession. In that case, the hammer may have been stolen not just for the pleasure of mischief, but also for the protection of Þrymr and his sister (and Loki himself), rather as Loki may similarly have taken Lævateinn partly to protect Sinmara and Surtr (and himself), and as Grendel, I suspect, stole the giant sword partly to protect himself and his mother.

Most importantly, Loki is elsewhere notorious for having taken a *teinn* which, like Lævateinn, was the only weapon that could pierce an otherwise invulnerable target. That *teinn* was, of course, the *mistilteinn* 'mistletoe' which slew Baldr, which Loki *sleit upp* 'tore up' from its location west of Valhöll, according to *Gylfaginning*.⁴⁷ It seems likely that Lævateinn and the *mistilteinn* are variants of each other, or at least

44 Both are tricksters and culture heroes of giantish stock, and each is punished by the gods by being bound to a rock, on which each writhes and is tormented by savage creatures; see F. S. Cawley, 'The Figure of Loki in Germanic Mythology', *Harvard Theological Review* 32 (1939), 309–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0017816000022446>; W. Hansen, 'Prometheus and Loki: The Myth of the Fettered God and his Kin', *C&M* 58 (2007), 65–118. Generally, on the myth of the theft of fire, which is often 'related to that of the theft of light or of the sun', see Witzel, *Origins*, 154, 157–8 (quotation on p. 154).

45 *SnESkald*, I, 20.

46 *SnESkald*, I, 24.

47 *SnEGylf*, 45. 'Tore up' is a rather odd expression to use of mistletoe, which does not root itself in the ground, though it does in the branches of trees. Snorri may well have been unfamiliar with mistletoe, which does not grow in Iceland. For some thoughts on this vexed issue, see M. Kaplan, 'Once More on the Mistletoe', in M. Kaplan and T. R. Tangherlini (ed.), *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture in Honor of John F. Lindow* (Berkeley, 2012), 36–60 at 56.

closely akin, as others have suspected.⁴⁸ They also both seem likely variants of Skírnir's *gambanteinn*, and therefore, at a greater remove, of Beowulf's giant sword.⁴⁹

More About Lævateinn and Mistilteinn

Two further pieces of evidence strengthen the likelihood that Lævateinn is closely related to the *mistilteinn* with which Loki instigated Baldr's death, and therewith probably also akin to Skírnir's *gambanteinn* and Beowulf's giant sword.

First is the Dutch word for 'mistletoe', *maretak*. Its literal meaning is 'mare's twig/branch', the 'mare' being a cognate of ON *mara* and Old English *mære* and *mær*, which survives in modern English 'nightmare'.⁵⁰ The 'mare' was a kind of trampling, smothering creature of female gender.⁵¹ We encountered it earlier as the second element in *Sinmara*, the name of the giantess who guards Lævateinn.

Second is the radiant sickle or scythe (*lé*, accusative singular *ljá*) which Svipdagr had to acquire and present to Sinmara in order to receive Lævateinn. This implement was presumably golden, like the cockerel Viðófnir in which it resided—a creature that, for one scholar, 'symbolizes the solar light'.⁵² To me, it calls to mind the golden sickle used by Gallic druids to harvest mistletoe in a rite invoking the moon, according to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (16.115). Pliny records that these druids harvested mistletoe from Valonia oaks:

48 Robinson, 'Edition', 126; E. Heide, 'Fjølsvinnsmål: Ei oversett nøkkelkjelde til nordisk mytologi' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Oslo, 1997), 167.

49 In Chapter 16 I suggest that the giant sword might also be connected with mistletoe through its pairing with Hrunting.

50 Cf. ON *marhrísla* 'mare-twig', a term included in a list of poetic terms for trees. It has been explained as referring to 'birch-twigs tangled from being ridden by a mara'; PTP, 883–4.

51 See I. Bērziņa, 'Mara—Uttrykk for fri kvinnelig seksualitet i norrøne kilder og norsk folketro', *Maal og Minne* 1 (2017), 47–77; A. Hall, 'The Evidence for *Maran*, the Anglo-Saxon "Nightmares"', *Neophilologus* 91 (2007), 299–317 at 311, an article that rightly rejects the idea that instances of the words *mære* and *mæra* in *Beowulf* (103, 762) identify the male Grendel as a 'mare'-monster, as proposed in N. K. Kiessling, 'Grendel: A New Aspect', *MP* 65 (1968), 191–201.

52 Zavaroni, 'Mead', 72. The same scholar adds: 'The name *Viðófnir* (*við*- 'wide' + *ófn* < *vafa* 'oscillate') is interpretable as 'Wide Oscillation' (a possible allusion to the course of the sun from dawn to sunset, from the early morning crowing to the twilight crowing of the cock).' For an interpretation of inscribed sickles of the European Bronze Age as lunar symbols, see Meller, *Der geschmiedete Himmel*, 118–23.

Est autem id rarum admodum inventu et repertum magna religione petitur et ante omnia sexta luna (quae principia mensum annorumque his facit) et saeculi post tricesimum annum, quia iam virium abunde habeat nec sit sui dimidia. Omnia sanantem appellantes suo vocabulo, sacrificio epulisque rite sub arbore comparatis duos admovent candidi coloris tauros quorum cornutum primum vinciantur. Sacerdos candida veste cultus arborem scandit, falce aurea demetit, candido id excipitur sago.⁵³

Mistletoe is, however, rather seldom found on Valonia oak, and when it is discovered it is gathered with great ceremony, and particularly on the sixth day of the moon (which for these tribes constitutes the beginning of the months and the years), and after every thirty years of a new generation, because it is then rising in strength and not one half of its full size. Hailing the moon in a native word that means 'healing all things',⁵⁴ they prepare a ritual sacrifice and banquet beneath a tree and bring up two white bulls, whose horns are bound for the first time on this occasion. A priest arrayed in white vestments climbs the tree and with a golden sickle cuts down the mistletoe, which is caught in a white cloak.⁵⁵

Despite the very large chronological and cultural gap, this resemblance may be more than coincidental, especially as the *Naturalis Historia* was known in early medieval Europe. From whatever written or oral source, *Svipdagsmál* may echo the druidic harvesting of mistletoe (represented by Lævateinn) with a golden sickle under a waxing, sickle-like crescent moon, albeit somewhat distortedly, given that Loki had already plucked the twig-weapon from the tree and deposited it in the underworld.

This explanation of *Svipdagsmál*'s sickle seems preferable to that offered by Peter Robinson. He identifies the *lé* as the 'scythe (or sickle) shaped tail feather of the cock, endowed with the magic power of opening locks', and compares a passage from a dialogue called 'The Dream, or the Cock' by Lucian of Samosata, a second-century Syrian. In this text, a cockerel states that any man who, with his permission, plucks his longest tail feather, may use it to open every door.⁵⁶ However,

53 Text adapted from H. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History in Ten Volumes*, 10 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), IV, 548, 550.

54 Perhaps compare, very broadly, Lyfjaberg, the mountain on which Menglǫð stood, which was a panacea for women in *Svipdagsmál*.

55 Translation from Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, IV, 549, 551. Noteworthy is the involvement of horned beasts, as the crescent moon is also 'horned'; we shall encounter more horned lunar creatures later in this study.

56 Robinson, 'Edition', 129.

as Robinson concedes, ‘worlds lie between the sophisticated *jeux*’ of Lucian and *Svipdagsmál*.⁵⁷ Secondly, Lucian’s feather, unlike that of *Svipdagsmál* and implicitly the druids’ golden sickle, does not gleam. Also, if, as argued below, *í lúðr* in *Svipdagsmál* refers not to Svipdagr’s placing of the sickle ‘in the case’ (the chest containing Lævateinn?), as Robinson thinks, but to his descent ‘into the maelstrom’, this eliminates the need to interpret the sickle as a key. Perhaps the marvellous sickle was instead required because it was the only blade capable of severing the divine locks on the chest securing Lævateinn. Or maybe it was simply demanded by the likely moon-giantess Sinmara as a gleaming replacement, if she were to relinquish Lævateinn. Assuming Svipdagr did obtain the sickle, however, he probably used it, or Lævateinn, to kill Sinmara.⁵⁸

Saxo’s Hotherus, Balderus and the Sword of Mimingus

Another parallel to the concealed Lævateinn and the *mistilteinn* that slew Baldr—one that may also suggest a solar connection—is the sword with which Hotherus (ON *Hǫðr*) slew Balderus (*Baldr*), his rival for the hand of Nanna, the beautiful daughter of a certain Gevar(us),⁵⁹ according to Saxo’s thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum* (3.2.5–6):

Nam ne ferro quidem sacram corporis eius firmitatem cedere perhibebat. Adiecit tamen scire se gladium artissimis obseratum claustris, quo fatum ei infligi possit. Hunc a Mimingo siluarum Satyro possideri. Eidem quoque armillam esse mira quadam arcanaque uirtute possessoris opes augere solitam. Horum praeterea locorum aditum inuium <ac> impedimentis

57 Robinson, ‘Edition’, 130.

58 In world mythology, sickles and sickle-like weapons, including swords, are often used by gods and great men to slay monsters and other foes. They include the weapon of the Mesopotamian sun-god Shamash; the weapon with which the Biblical *Samson* (as noted earlier, probably from Hebrew *shemesh* ‘sun’) killed a thousand Philistines; the weapon with which Cain slew Abel; the weapon with which Zeus overcame Typhon; and the weapon with which Perseus slew Medusa; see A. A. Barb, ‘Cain’s Murder-Weapon and Samson’s Jawbone of an Ass’, *JWCI* 35 (1972), 386–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750938>; I. Signorini, ‘Monsters, the Gaze, Death, and the Hero. An Outsider’s Rambling Thoughts on *Beowulf*, *Grettis Saga* and the Myth of Medusa’, in T. Pàroli (ed.), *La funzione dell’eroe germanico: storicità, metafora, paradigma: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio Roma, 6–8 maggio 1993* (Rome, 1995), 27–39 at 39.

59 Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 202 identifies him as a moon-god.

obfusum haud facile mortalibus patere posse. Maiorem siquidem itineris partem inusitati frigoris ui perenniter obsideri. Iubet itaque, ceruis iugalibus currum instruat, cuius celeritate eximio gelu rigentia iuga transcendat. Quo cum peruenerit, tabernaculum suum ita a sole auersum constituat, ut umbram specus, cui Mimingus assueuisset, excipiat, nec ipsum mutua tamen obumbratione contingat, ne satyrum insolitae obscuritatis iactus exitu deturbaret. Ita armillam ensemque in expedito fore, quorum alterum opum, alterum belli fortuna comitaretur; in utroque ingens possessori premium esse.

Hactenus Geuarus. Nec inerte Høtherus, que ab ipso didicerat, executus, tabernaculo ad predictum modum locato noctu curas, interdium uenationes agebat. Vtramque temporis uicem peruigil exsomnisque ducebat, ita discrimina lucis noctisque partitus, ut hanc rerum meditationi tribueret, illam conuectandis corporis alimentis impenderet. Cumque forte pernox attonita curis mente languesceret, obumbrantem tabernaculo suo satyrum hasta petiuit obrutumque ictu nec satis fuge potentem uinculis interceptit. Vltima deinde per summam uerborum atrocitatem minatus ensem armillamque deposcit. Nec segniter satyrus salutis redemptionem, que ab ipso petebatur, exhibuit. Adeo cunctis rebus prior est uita, cum nihil apud mortales spiritu charius existere soleat. Høtherus opum adeptione letatus patriam repetit, paucis sed insignibus spoliis foelix.

His [Balderus'] body, Gevar asserted, possessed a holy strength impermeable even to steel. Yet, he added, there existed, to his knowledge, shut away behind the tightest barriers, a sword which could deal him his fate. It belonged to Miming, a wood-troll. This creature also possessed a bracelet with the miraculous hidden power of increasing its owner's wealth. The approach to those regions was pathless, beset with obstacles, and hard of access to any human being. The greater length of the route, in fact, was perpetually invested by devastating cold. He therefore gave Høther instructions to yoke a team of reindeer to his sledge so that he could cross over the hard-frozen mountain ridges at tremendous speed. When he reached his destination he must erect his tent away from the sun so that it caught the shade of the cave where Miming lived; but the tent's shadow should not touch the cave in return, otherwise the unusual patch of darkness it cast might drive the troll back from the entrance. In this way the bracelet and sword would be within his grasp, the one accompanied by material prosperity, the other by success in fighting; both spelt a great boon to their possessor.

That was Gevar's advice. Høther followed his prescriptions to the letter and, when he had pitched his tent as dictated, he devoted the nights to his anxieties, the days to hunting. He passed the revolutions of the sun watchful and unsleeping, and only marked the divisions between light and darkness by spending the one in meditation and the other in gathering bodily sustenance. During one night's vigil, as he was drooping, his mind numbed by worries, the shadow of the troll chanced to fall across his tent; Høther went for him with his spear, felled him with a lunge and bound him while he was still powerless to get away. Then, threatening the worst with utmost savagery, he demanded the sword and the bracelet. The troll was not slow to buy his safety with the required ransom. Life is so much more valuable than any kind of property, for nothing is dearer than breath to mortal creatures. The happy Høther returned to his own country in possession of the treasures, rejoicing in his small but invaluable spoils.⁶⁰

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The name of the satyr (or 'wood-troll' as translated above), *Mimingus* (*Mimingr*), resembles *Mimi/Mími*, the owner of the world-tree from which Loki probably stole *Lævateinn* in *Svipdagsmál* (conceivably *Lævateinn*, or an equivalent weapon, was also known as *Mimingr/Mimingr* 'Scion of Mimi/Mími'). This resemblance, together with *Mimingus'* sylvan nature, suggests that *Mimingus'* sword probably came originally from a tree—that it was another twig-sword. Both weapons also have in common their concealment in almost inaccessible places, reached only by journeying over frozen mountains. However, the actual places of concealment differ.

Elsewhere in Germanic literature the similar name *Mim(m)ing* and variants thereof denote remarkable swords. We have already encountered one instance in *Hjálmpés saga*, where *Mímungr* is an alternative name for *Snarvendill*, the candle-sword which appears analogous to the giant sword.⁶¹ Another sword called *Mimming* appears centuries earlier in the

60 Text and translation from *GD*, I, 146–9.

61 On this sword-name in Germanic literature, see G. T. Gillespie, *A Catalogue of Persons Named in German Heroic Literature (700–1600) Including Named Animals and Objects and Ethnic Names* (Oxford, 1973), 94–5. Gillespie, however, states that 'The short vowel of this sword-name makes any association with the smith *Mîme* [= ON *Mímir*] unlikely, especially as its fashioning is always attributed to *Wieland* [= OE *Weland*].'

fragmentary Old English poem *Waldere*.⁶² There it is described as *Weland geworc* 'Weland-work',⁶³ and as a hard weapon to wield, but also as one that *ne geswiced* 'does not fail' the man who can hold it, as it is the *maðma cyst* 'choicest of treasures' (*Fragment I*, 2–4, 24); similarly the giant sword could be wielded only by Beowulf, whom, unlike other swords, it did not fail, it being the *wæpna cyst* 'choicest of weapons' (1559). In addition, the Mimming of *Waldere* was probably kept *on stanfate stille gehided* 'hidden stilly in a stone vat/vessel/casket/scabbard(?)' (*Fragment II*, 3); if its stony container were a casket, rather than (perhaps) a scabbard adorned by gemstones, it would appear functionally comparable to the locked iron chest in which Sinmara kept *Lævateinn*.⁶⁴ We might also infer from *stille* 'stilly' that, unless Mimming were kept in such a container, it would move or blaze violently of its own accord, like Freyr's giant-killing sword. In the Middle English romance *Horn Childe*, a woman gives the eponymous hero a sword called *Bitter-fer* 'Bitter Iron', which hung by a ring and *þe make of miming* 'the equal/match of Miming', the king of all swords, and which had been made by Weland;⁶⁵ it will be recalled that the giant sword also had a ring and hung from a wall. Another sword of this name appears in the mid-thirteenth-century Norwegian *Þiðreks saga af Bern* 'Saga of Þiðrekr of Bern'; there the name denotes a sword made by Velent (ON *Vǫlundr*, OE *Weland*), a student latterly of two dwarf-smiths, and earlier of a smith called *Mímir*.⁶⁶ It appears not unlikely, therefore, that Saxo's Mimingus and his sword shared the same name or a very similar one.

Another distinct possibility is that Mimingus' sword was alternatively, or additionally,⁶⁷ called *Mistilteinn*, or at least identified with mistletoe. One reason for thinking this is the appearance of a sword of this name in an Old Norse saga to be examined later.⁶⁸ Another, of course, is that, according to *Gylfaginning*, Baldr was slain by mistletoe, albeit in the form of a projectile, not a sword. This possibility is strengthened by

62 See Himes, *Old English Epic*, 78–81, 101–8.

63 Perhaps better emended to *Welandes geworc* 'Weland's work'.

64 Cf. *MIFL*, motif A721 'Sun kept in box'.

65 J. Hall (ed.), *King Horn: A Middle English Romance* (Oxford, 1901), 183–4 (lines 397–408).

66 Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 1954), I, 97–9.

67 Recall that Snarvendill is also called *Mímungr*.

68 See Chapter 15.

the pairing of Mimingus' sword with a bracelet or armring of riches, since a similar combination is possessed by Skírnir in *För Skírnis*. Before overcoming Gerðr with the *gambanteinn*, Skírnir threatened her with a sword and offered her a magical ring that had been burnt on Baldr's pyre; this ring is identifiable as Draupnir, which was an armring of riches in the sense that eight other rings dripped from it every ninth night.

A reason to identify Mimingus' sword with sunlight is not immediately apparent from the quoted passage, although the passage does mention the sun. The curious preparations Hotherus has to make in order to capture the satyr, which involve him erecting his tent *away* from the sun and apparently watching by night, may indicate that the cave-dwelling Mimingus is a creature of nocturnal (lunar?) shadow, in which he keeps the sword. However, the possibility of a solar identity for this weapon, and a lunar identity for Mimingus, will strengthen later when we examine an episode from the Old Norse *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra* 'Saga of King Heiðrekr the Wise' (*Heiðreks saga*). In it a dwarf (compare Mimingus), who had probably stolen and hidden part of the sun in the darkness of his stony home, is similarly restrained outside his abode after sunset by a huntsman and made to hand over a solar sword.⁶⁹

Lævateinn in the *Lúðr*

The likelihood of kinship between *Svipdagsmál's* Lævateinn and the giant sword of *Beowulf* strengthens considerably with the recognition that, after plucking the former twig-weapon, Loki took it to a place of concealment *below water* next to Sinmara. We may compare the presence of the (probably stolen) giant sword in the mere near to Grendel's mother.

A submarine location for the concealed Lævateinn is not obvious, but may be deduced with some confidence from its placement beside Sinmara in an iron chest secured by *njarðlásar níu* 'nine Njörðr-locks'. Njörðr (Njörðr) was Freyr's maritime father and his nine locks, I suspect, relate to his nine daughters, who may well, like those of Ægir, be personified waves.⁷⁰ Sinmara, who seems to function as Lævateinn's

⁶⁹ See Chapter 13.

⁷⁰ See Chapter 13.

guardian in the underworld, and whose paleness may suggest both a deathly pallor and moonlight,⁷¹ lived in or below a *lúðr* (*Fjölsvinnsmál* 30). This word literally means the ‘wooden frame of a hand-mill’, or part thereof, but may also be used *pars pro toto* in the sense ‘mill’.⁷² Here it very probably has a metaphorical aquatic sense which was established earlier, in *Grógaldr*, in Gróa’s description of her sixth incantation to Svipdagr:

‘Þann gel ek þér inn séttá, ef þú á sjó kœmr
meira en menn viti:
logn ok lōgr gangi þér í lúðr saman
ok ljái þér æ friðrjúgrar farar.’⁷³ (11)

‘This I chant for you as the sixth (incantation), if you come upon a sea greater than men know: may calm and ocean/water go together for you in the *lúðr* and always grant you a peaceful journey.’

The editor of the most detailed edition of *Svipdagsmál* translates this instance of *lúðr* as ‘the mill’ and a second instance, in *Fjölsvinnsmál* 30 (quoted earlier), as ‘the case’.⁷⁴ This is inconsistent, and the translation of the latter instance as ‘the case’ seems unhelpful as it invites confusion with the chest containing Lævateinn (called a *ker*, not a *lúðr*, in *Fjölsvinnsmál* 26). Both instances of *lúðr* seem rather to be metaphors for the same thing: a (or the) ‘maelstrom’ (etymologically a ‘milling/grinding stream’), the basis of the analogy being that a giant whirlpool revolves and destroys whatever enters its ‘eye’, like a mill. This metaphorical sense of *lúðr* is attested in a skaldic stanza, probably of the tenth or eleventh century, by a skaldic poet called Snæbjörn. It describes a whirlpool as the *eylúðr* ‘island-mill-frame’

71 Cf. Hebrew *lěbānā* ‘white lady’, a term for the moon; van der Toorn, Becking and van der Horst, *Dictionary*, 586.

72 See *PTP*, 378; C. Tolley, ‘The Mill in Norse and Finnish Mythology’, *SBVS* 24 (1994–7), 63–82 at 70; C. Tolley (ed.), *Grottasöngur: The Song of Grotti* (London, 2008), illustration facing p. 1, 2. With regards to milling it may be noted that *Vafþrúðnismál* 23 describes how, each day, the siblings *Máni* ‘Moon’ and *Sól* ‘Sun’ have to turn the sky, arguably imagined as the upper of two millstones turned with the aid of a male figure called *Mundilfæri* ‘Mill-Handle-Mover(?)’; see also *SnEGylf*, 13; *SnESkald*, I, 39. For another milling link, see E. G. Suhr, ‘The Maerchen and the Eclipse’, *Folklore* 83 (1972), 272–86 at 274.

73 Adapted from Robinson, ‘Edition’, 64–5.

74 Robinson, ‘Edition’, 65, 77, 130.

of Grotti, a mythological hand-mill turned by *níu brúðir* ‘nine brides’ (waves, daughters of Ægir).⁷⁵ A story in *Gylfaginning*, analogous to, or partly influenced by, the Biblical myth of the Flood and Noah’s Ark also appears relevant. Snorri records that after the killing of Ymir, so much blood flowed from the primordial giant’s wounds that the whole race of frost-giants was drowned, except for one, Bergelmir, who *fór upp á lúðr sinn ok kona hans ok helzk þar* ‘went up on his *lúðr* [i.e., coffin/ark?] with his wife and was kept safe there’.⁷⁶ Although Snorri’s interpretation of *lúðr* differs, here too we have a marine *lúðr* in turbulent waters. Snorri’s main source for this myth was *Vafþrúðnismál* (29, 35), which he seems to have either misinterpreted or reinterpreted; that poem records how the giant *Bergelmir* ‘Bundle of Reaped Barley Grain’, son of *Þrúðgelmir* ‘Bundle of Powerfully Thriving Reaped Grain’, son of *Aurgelmir* ‘Bundle of Ears (of Corn)’ was *á lúðr um lagiðr* ‘laid in/on a mill(frame)’.⁷⁷ There may, however, also be an aquatic aspect to *Vafþrúðnismál*’s version of events, as the element *gelmir* seen in these giant-names elsewhere designates rivers.⁷⁸

Another possible reason to associate *Lævateinn*, as a twig-sword, with a *lúðr* in the sense ‘mill’ – though this time not an aquatic one – is the naming of certain components of the historical Norse handmill. As well as an upper part called the *skapttré* ‘shaft-tree’ in Iceland, the handmill had a piece of wood called the ‘lightening tree’ in Shetland, the *lettetre* in Norway and possibly the *léttitré* in Old Norse.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Shetlandic water-mills had a small wooden cross-bar called a *swerd* ‘sword’, which passed through the head of the lightening tree on the mill floor.⁸⁰ Additionally, in English dialect, a *lowder* (< ON *lúðr*), as well as denoting ‘the wooden bench upon which a hand-mill rests; the foundation supporting the nether millstone’,⁸¹ can mean ‘a wooden lever or hand-spoke used for lifting the millstones; any long, stout,

75 *PTP*, 377–8; *SnESkald*, I, 38; Tolley, ‘The Mill’, 69–71; Tolley, *Grottasöngur*, 25–6. *Eylúðr* is also an alias of Óðinn, though perhaps with an entirely different meaning; *PTP*, 748–9.

76 *SnEGylf*, 11.

77 I base these translations of personal names on the analysis in R. D. Fulcr, ‘An Eddic Analogue to the Scyld Scefig Story’, *RES* 40 (1989), 313–22.

78 As noted in Tolley, ‘*Beowulf*’s Scyld Scefig Episode’, 30–1.

79 Tolley, *Grottasöngur*, illustration facing p. 1.

80 G. Goudie, *The Celtic and Scandinavian Antiquities of Shetland* (Edinburgh, 1904), 262.

81 *EDD* s.v. ‘lowder’ sb.¹

rough stick' (sometimes used as a makeshift weapon), in which sense the compound *louthar-tree* is also attested.⁸² Might there be a connection with the twig-sword that Loki took from Mimi's tree down into the *lúðr*?⁸³

If both instances of *lúðr* in *Svipdagsmál* denote the same thing, a 'milling' whirlpool, this clarifies the narrative. Svipdagr has to carry the sickle into the maelstrom in order to give it to Sinmara, a task he can accomplish by using Gróa's maelstrom-calming incantation.

The Maelstrom-Giantess in Sagas of *Hjálmþér*, *Grettir* and *Samson*

We met another possible whirlpool-giantess earlier, in *Hjálmþés saga*. I interpreted the name of the hero's wicked stepmother, *Lúða*, as 'She of the Mill-(Frame)/Whirlpool (*lúðr*)', although her link with a maelstrom is obscure in the saga. It will, however, be recalled that it was from *Lúða* that *Vargeisa* received *Snarvendill*, a blade probably analogous to *Lævateinn* and the giant sword, two weapons recovered from giantesses beneath turbulent waters. It seems likely, therefore, that at an earlier stage *Snarvendill* also came from a monstrous female who lived in a whirlpool.

Two other Old Norse saga-episodes testify more clearly to the presence of a troll-woman or 'goddess' beneath turbulent, 'milling' water. That both episodes are accepted analogues to the mere-episode of *Beowulf* strengthens the case which I shall shortly make for identifying *Grendel's* mother as a maelstrom-giantess, and therefore for comparing the giant sword to *Lævateinn*.

Toward the end of the Sandhaugur-episode of *Grettis saga* (chapter 66), *Grettir* inscribes on a rune-stick two skaldic stanzas describing his recent experiences. The first reads:

82 *EDD* s.v. 'lowder' sb.² and v.¹

83 Note also, for a connection between swords and mills, a reference to the West Saxons' victory *mecum mylenscearpum* 'with mill-sharpened swords' in the Old English poem *The Battle of Brunanburh* (24); see S. Walton, 'Words of Technological Virtue: "The Battle of Brunanburh" and Anglo-Saxon Sword Manufacture', *Technology and Culture* 36 (1995), 987–99. A sword such as *Lævateinn* whose home was a 'mill' might therefore have been supposed to be extraordinarily sharp.

Gekk ek í gljúfr et dökkva,
 gein veltiflug steina
 við hjörgæði hríðar
 hlunns úrsvølum munni;
 fast lá framan at brjósti
 flugstraumr í sal Naumu;
 heldr kom á herðar skaldi
 hǫrð fjón Braga kvánar.⁸⁴

I went into a dark gulf, the vaulted flight of stones gaped with spray-cold mouth at the sword-endower of the storm of the ship-roller [ROUGH SEA > WARRIOR, i.e., Grettir]; the flight-stream struck hard from the front against my breast in the hall of Nauma <Iðunn?> [CAVE]; there rather came on to the poet's shoulders the hard hate of Bragi's wife [IÐUNN].

Here, in addition to using images of stormy water and a whirlpool,⁸⁵ Grettir apparently likens the horrifyingly animate environment of a cave in which giants lived to the hall of the goddess *Iðunn*, wife of Bragi, god of poetry. This equation conceals a pun on both ON *iða* 'eddy'⁸⁶ and *unnr* 'wave', with reference to the violent waters that assail Grettir. Significantly too, the name *Nauma*, a word of uncertain etymology which elsewhere denotes a river and an island,⁸⁷ may well identify *Iðunn* as a wolfish troll-woman, who is presumably equatable with the ogress whom Grettir had encountered shortly earlier and whom he said had dived into the gulf. In stanza 8 of some manuscripts of the Eddic poem *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Nauma* seems to be an alias of *Iðunn*, who, having sunk down from the world-tree *Yggdrasil*, found herself in nocturnal darkness beneath the tree, where she donned a wolfskin, altered her disposition, delighted in *lævisi* 'treachery' and changed shape.⁸⁸ We may compare Grendel's mother as trollish *brimwylf* 'sea-she-wolf' in a turbulent mere beneath overhanging trees, and the association of the giantess-'goddess' *Sinmara* with both Mimi's tree and *læ* (in *Lævateinn*). Noteworthy, too, is the gaping mouth of *Nauma/Iðunn*'s cave as the *hjörgæðir* 'sword-endower' (Grettir) approached, as it appears to echo

84 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 216–7; on the two stanzas, see Jorgensen, 'Grendel, Grettir'.

85 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 217.

86 B. Scudder, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* (London, 2005), 153.

87 See *ANES* s.v. and *ÍO* s.v.

88 Lassen, *Hrafnagaldur*, 85.

the *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' nature of Grendel's mother when Beowulf, armed with the sword Hrunting, approached her lair (*Beowulf* 1498).⁸⁹

Second is an episode in the fourteenth- or fifteenth-century *Samsons saga fagra* 'Saga of Samson the Fair'. It tells of an evil arch-thief and harpist called *Kvin(n)talin/Kvin(n)telin* (compare *Grendel*?) who tried to abduct an Irish princess called Valentina. Kvintalin was the son of a British miller called *Galinn* 'Bewitched' and an anonymous *gyðja* 'goddess' who lived *undir mylnufossinum* 'under the mill-waterfall/stream'.⁹⁰ The fair English hero Samson, whose name probably derives ultimately from Hebrew *shemesh* 'sun', set out to find Valentina and sought Galinn's help. He met him at the mill beside the waterfall, beneath which was *hylur djúpur með miklu iðukasti* 'a deep hole with a great surging eddy'.⁹¹ While they were talking, Samson's legs were seized, doubtless by the *gyðja*, and he was pulled down into the waterfall. At first he found himself powerless against the *gyðja*, now called a *tröllkona* 'troll-woman' (compare *Nauma/Iðunn*), but he managed to disembowel her with a knife which he had brought with him.⁹² He saw there a fine bed and many gold and silver treasures in a side-cave, from which he took what he wanted. He found it difficult to get out, but passed through a stone door and eventually returned to the settlements of men. He was then directed to Jarl Finnlaugr of Bretland, to whom he related events in detail and showed the treasures, as he did later to King Garlant of Ireland. He then sailed home to England, where he told his father, King Arthur, about his journeys.⁹³

Scholars have long recognized a parallel between this episode and *Beowulf*'s fight with Grendel's mother and its aftermath, but they have not necessarily noted the correspondence of the subsequent displays of recovered treasure to lords who include a father-figure. Nor to my knowledge have they appreciated the significance of the whirlpool

89 See further Chapter 15.

90 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (ed.), *Riddarasögur*, 6 vols (Reykjavík, 1954), III, 354. For a translation, see B. Waggoner (trans.), *Sagas of Imagination: A Medieval Icelandic Reader* (Philadelphia, 2018), 253–83; for a study, see W. W. Lawrence, 'Beowulf and the *Saga of Samson the Fair*', in K. Malone and M. B. Ruud (ed.), *Studies in English Philology: a Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber* (Minneapolis, 1929), 172–81. Galinn himself steals Samson's sword, though the hero recovers it.

91 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, III, 361.

92 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, III, 362–3.

93 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, III, 364.

beneath the mill, which parallels not only the mill-whirlpool beneath which Sinmara resides but also the turbulent waters of Grendel's mere, wherein lurks another maelstrom-giantess.

Grendel's Mother as Maelstrom-Giantess

Sinmara's home beneath a whirlpool, where she guarded Lævateinn, also finds parallel in the submarine abode of Grendel's mother, within which the giant sword hung from a wall. *Beowulf* repeatedly describes the mere's waters as moving, churning, grasping and dangerous: *atol yða geswing* 'terrible swirl of waves' (848), *wæteregeſan* 'water-terrors' (1260), *cealde streamas* 'cold currents' (1261), *yðgeblond/yðgebland* 'wave-blending(s)' (1373, 1620), *sundgebland* 'water-blending' (1450), *yða gewin* 'strife of waves' (1469), *holma geþring* 'throng of waters' (2132), *wælm* 'whelm' (2135). In addition, the mere is a place where waters go down, and when Beowulf dives in, the *brimwylm onfeng / hilderince* 'sea-whelm took the battle-warrior' (1494–5). This is all highly suggestive of a maelstrom. Also, inside Grendel's hall Beowulf finds that *hrinan ne meahte / færgripe flodes* 'the flood's sudden grip could not touch (him)' (1515–6)—we may perhaps compare the relatively calm 'eye' of a whirlpool. Additionally, once both Grendel and his mother were dead, *lagu drusade* 'the lake subsided' (1630), which attests to its former turbulence.

Noteworthy, too, is the poet's description of how *þonon yðgeblond up astigeð / won to wolcnum þonne wind styreþ / lað gewidru, oð þæt lyft ðrysmæþ, roderas reotað* 'From there [i.e., the mere] a wave-blending ascends up, dark, to the clouds, when the wind stirs up hostile weathers, until it chokes the air, the heavens weep' (1373–6). This passage resembles an early medieval Irish account of a violent whirlpool, though I imply no direct relationship between the two. *Sanas Cormaic* 'Cormac's Glossary' records how the Corryvreckan whirlpool off Rathlin Island, having swallowed water, vomited it to the sky, where its roaring was heard among the clouds.⁹⁴ Furthermore, this whirlpool, like its namesake between the isles of Jura and Scarba in the Inner Hebrides, was popularly known as the 'cauldron of the old woman'. She was possibly originally

94 W. Stokes, *Three Irish Glossaries* (London, 1862), 13–4; J. O'Donovan (trans.), *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac's Glossary* (Calcutta, 1868), 41.

an Irish war-goddess, the *Morrígan/Mórrígan* '(Night)mare Queen', the first element of whose name is cognate with *-mara* '(night)-mare (monster)' in ON *Sinmara*.⁹⁵ Grendel's murderous mother was similarly an old woman, having kept watch over the waters of her mere for *hund missera* 'a hundred half-years' (1498). And, as we shall shortly see, she also acted in the manner of a 'mare'-monster.

Together, then, *Svipdagsmál*, *Grettis saga*, *Samsons saga fagra* and *Beowulf* provide evidence that a nightmarish giantess, often associated with a male giant and a sword, was imagined to live beneath milling waters. Given the probable solar nature of the giant sword in *Beowulf*, this correspondence of locations and guardians inspires greater confidence that the similarly located and guarded *Lævateinn* was also radiant.

I shall return to *Svipdagsmál* toward the end of this study to elucidate further the myth that seems to underpin both it and *För Skírnis* in relation to *Beowulf*. In the next chapter, though, I turn to an examination of the solar associations of (Yngvi-)Freyr, with whom I have associated Hroðgar, and of Skírnir, with whom *Beowulf* and *Svipdagr* appear comparable.

95 J. MacKillop, *A Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford, 2004), 107; E. G. Quin et al., 's.v. *Morrígan, mórrígu*', in *Dictionary of the Irish Language* (Dublin, 1913–75), http://www.dil.ie/search?q=Morr%C3%ADgan&search_in=headword

9. Freyr's Solar Power and the Purifying Sword

This chapter examines a variety of Old Norse sources to demonstrate the solar and related attributes of (Ingvi/Yngvi-)Freyr and his sword.¹ We shall see that in Skírnir's hands this weapon probably symbolizes a purifying sunbeam. These findings will inform our understanding of Hrunting and the giant sword as comparable weapons.

Solar Aspects of Freyr in the *Eddas*

In *Gylfaginning*, Snorri describes Freyr and his sister Freyja as *føgr álitum ok máttug* 'fair in appearance and mighty',² before continuing:

Freyr er hinn ágætasti af Ásum. Hann ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar ok þar með ávexti jarðar, ok á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar. Hann ræðr ok fésælu manna.³

Freyr is the most excellent of Æsir/gods. He rules over the rain and the sun's shining and therewith the earth's produce, and to him it is good to pray for fruitfulness and peace. He also rules the wealth of men.

Elsewhere, in chapter 10 of *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri describes Freyr as a king of the Swedes, a people who loved and worshipped him above other gods because they believed he brought them peace and good harvests, even after his death. They called him *veraldargoð* 'god of the world' and sacrificed to him *til árs ok friðar* 'for a good harvest and peace'.⁴

1 See also André, *Tracing*, 155–7, 189.

2 *SnEGylf*, 24.

3 *SnEGylf*, 24.

4 Bjarni Aðalbarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 23–5.

From these passages it appears clear that Freyr was an important fertility deity who could bestow benign growing weather, of which sunshine was a fundamental aspect.

In *Skáldskaparmál* Snorri adds that Freyr rode, by night and day across sky and sea, a boar called *Gullinbu(r)sti* ‘Golden-Bristle(d)’ whose bristles illuminated the darkest places.⁵

Among Snorri’s sources of information were *Völuspá* and *Grímnismál*, two of the most important mythological Eddic poems. They provide further details.

Völuspá 53 indicates that at Ragnarök Freyr will advance *bjartr* ‘bright’ against Surtr, before whom he will fall. The first half of the preceding stanza reads *Surtr ferr sunnan með sviga lævi, / scínn af sverði sól valtíva*, an ambiguous passage. It could mean either ‘Surtr fares from the south with the fraud/treason/bane of switches,⁶ the sun shines from the sword of the gods of the slain’ or ‘Surtr fares from the south with the fraud/treason/bane of switches, the sun of the gods of the slain shines from the sword’. Either way, the unique expression *sviga lævi* is usually interpreted as a kenning for ‘fire’, but it might more specifically be a kenning for a fiery twig-sword, specifically the solar sword of the following line.⁷ In that case, *sviga lævi* would be suggestive of *Lævateinn*, the probably radiant sword guarded by ‘Surtr’s Sinmara’ in *Svipdagsmál*. This, we have seen, may well be a mistletoe-weapon that at one time came into the possession of Svipdagr, a figure analogous to Skírnir and to Freyr.

Grímnismál 43 refers to *skírum Frey* ‘clear/bright/shining Freyr’. Additionally, this poem’s fifth stanza records that Freyr owned *Álfheimr* ‘Elf-Home’, the world of elves. The intimacy of this race of creatures

5 *SnESkald*, I, 18, 42; cf. Tolkien, *Saga*, 31. According to the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* 7, Freyja also rode a boar with golden bristles. On boars in Germanic myth and legend, see R. North, ‘You Sexy Beast: The Pig in a Villa in Vandalic North Africa, and Boar-Cults in Old Germanic Heathendom’, in M. D. J. Bintley and T. J. T. Williams (ed.), *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia* (Woodbridge, 2015), 151–75; A. Thompson, ‘The Boar’, <http://thethegns.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/boar.html>

6 ‘Switch’ in the sense ‘thin, flexible twig’.

7 For an argument that Surtr’s use of a fiery sword at Ragnarök has a basis in Anglo-Saxon or related homiletic traditions about the fiery sword of God on Doomsday, see K. Samplonius, ‘The Background and Scope of *Völuspá*’, in T. Gunnell and A. Lassen (ed.), *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to ‘Völuspá’ and Nordic Days of Judgement* (Turnhout, 2013), 113–45 at 117–126.

with the sun is indicated by the sun's designation as *álfrøðull* 'elf-halo' in two Eddic poems (*Vafþrúðnismál* 47; *För Skírnis* 4).⁸

Skírnir as Purifier

Further support for the concept of Freyr's giant-fighting sword and the *gambanteinn* (and therefore, by likely analogy, Beowulf's Hrunting and giant sword) as solar weapons exists in the name of their wielder, *Skírnir*. This word's closest relatives are ON *skírna* 'to become clear, brighten' and *skírn* 'baptism'. Another close relative is *skírr* 'clear/bright/shining', an adjective used of the sun and which we have just seen applied to Freyr in *Grímnismál* 43, and which also has the metaphorical sense 'cleansed from guilt'.⁹ We may infer that *Skírnir* was a shining, purificatory

8 Also *SnESkald*, I, 85. Note too that Snorri makes *Álfheimr* the home of the *ljósálfar* 'light-elves' specifically; *SnEGylf*, 19.

9 CV s.v. With the sword of Freyr/Skírnir which fought of its own accord against giants, if its owner was wise, we may also compare the sword of Edward the Confessor, which in Old Norse was called *Skírteinn*, literally 'Pure/Bright-Twig' (but note also *skírteini* 'proof, evidence'), according to a probably thirteenth-century Icelandic story. *Hemings Þáttur Áslákssonar* 'The Tale of Hemingr Ásláksson' records that Edward was a *vittr maðr* 'wise man' who, according to one character's testimony, *á eitt sverð, er Skírteinn heitir ... En sú náttúra fylgir honum, at hverjum manni verðr hann at bana, er lýgr; enn á þann bitr hann ekki sem satt segir* 'has a sword which is called Skírteinn ... And its nature is such that it slays any man who lies, but it does not bite on the man who speaks truth'; Gudbrand Vigfússon and G. W. Dasent (ed. and trans.), *Icelandic Sagas and Other Historical Documents Relating to the Settlements and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles*, 4 vols (London, 1887–94), I, 359–60; see also G. Fellows Jensen (ed.), *Hemings Þáttur Áslákssonar* (Copenhagen, 1962), 29; A. Faulkes (trans.), *Hemings Þáttur* (Dundee, 2016), 22, where the name is translated 'Proof'; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 55. The equivalent name in Old English would be **Scirtan*, but ON *Skírteinn* may well be an adaptation of the sword's Anglo-French name, *Curtein* (itself from Latin *curtus* 'shortened'). This word was latinized as *Curtana*, by which name its seventeenth-century replacement among the royal regalia of the British monarchy is still known, beside its ceremonial title of the 'Sword of Mercy', the foremost of the three 'Swords of Justice'. On *Curtein/Curtana* and its reproductions, see H. R. Luard (ed.), *Matthæi Parisiensis, Monachi Sancti Albani, Chronica Majora. Volume III: A.D. 1216 to A.D. 1239* (London, 1876), III, 337; *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edn., art. 'Curtana'; MED s.v. *Curtana*; M. Holmes, *The Crown Jewels at the Tower of London*, 3rd edn. (London, 1968); E. Mason, 'The Hero's Invincible Weapon: an Aspect of Angevin Propaganda', in C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (ed.), *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood*, 4 vols (Woodbridge, 1990), III, 121–37 at 134; E. M. R. Ditmas, 'The Curtana or Sword of Mercy', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 29 (1966), 122–33; E. M. R. Ditmas, 'More Arthurian Relics', *Folklore* 77 (1966), 91–104 at 91–3. Cf., in *Beowulf*, the patterned sword which *scyran moste, / cwealmbealu cyðan* 'had to make (it) clear/settle (it), make its mortal attack known' (1939–40).

figure who wielded weapons with the same properties against giants.¹⁰ Although the cleansing aspect of Skírnir's nature is understandably obscured in *För Skírnis*, a poem in which a radiant giantess is the object of desire, his efforts nevertheless succeed in transforming her frosty standoffishness into a warm acceptance of sexual union with Freyr.

Judging from various Norse sources, a purificatory function for Skírnir's weapons would be in keeping with the general conception of their victims, the giants, as disease-spirits responsible for the affliction of women in particular. The *Icelandic Rune Poem*, which is first attested in sixteenth-century manuscripts but probably preserves earlier traditions, explains the name of the *Durs*-rune (*Þ*) thus: *Þ er kvenna kuṡl 'Þ[urs] [i.e., 'giant'] is women's torment'*.¹¹ Similarly, the *Swedish Rune Poem*, preserved in a letter dated 1600, states that *Tors qūinne qūāl 'Giant (is) women's torment'*.¹² Similarly again, the *Norwegian Rune Poem*, which survives in seventeenth-century copies, records that *Þ uællḁr kuenna k[villu] 'Þ[urs] causes women's sickness'*.¹³ The torment and sickness in question in these poems is presumably either menstruation or labour, or both.

Ironically, then, it would seem that by inscribing (or threatening to inscribe) the *Durs*-rune on the *gambanteinn*, the purifying Skírnir may have been inflicting—or probably rather threatening to inflict—a painful, bloody flood upon Gerḁr,¹⁴ although he does promise to remove the inscription if she accedes to his wishes. As touched on

10 Cf. G. Steinsland, 'Pagan Myth in Confrontation with Christianity: *Skírnismál* and *Genesis*', in T. Ahlbäck (ed.), *Old Norse and Finnish Religions and Cultic Place-Names* (Åbo, 1990), 316–28 at 324: 'Skírnir may be interpreted as "Baptizer", he then turns out to be a pagan parallel to the Baptist, the forerunner of the Saviour'.

11 R. I. Page, *The Icelandic Rune-Poem* (London, 1999), 27, 35; Bauer, *Runengedichte*, 165.

12 Bauer, *Runengedichte*, 212. Also note an episode in *Skáldskaparmál* in which the bloody(?) effusion of the giantess Gjalp into the river Vimur threatens to overwhelm Þórr, until he stems the flow with the help of a rowan-bush; *SnESkáld*, I, 25.

13 Bauer, *Runengedichte*, 118 (adapted).

14 This interpretation is compatible with the notion of giants identified with the moon (for which see especially Chapter 14), which was traditionally believed to govern menstruation on the basis that the lunar and menstrual cycles roughly coincide. See Cashford, *Moon*, 202–9; Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, 70–1; S. Cohen, 'Melatonin, Menstruation and the Moon', *Townsend Letter for Doctors & Patients* (February 2005), 94–6. From this perspective, Skírnir's threat might be to turn Gerḁr, a likely lunar giantess, into a 'blood-moon', an eclipse phenomenon in which the moon turns blood-red, as noted in entries for the years 734 and 1117 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

earlier, we may compare Beowulf's attacking of Grendel's mother with the giant sword, a weapon inscribed (though not by him) with runes describing events or behaviour that resulted in the giants' destruction in the Flood. Comparably as well, Beowulf's decapitation of Grendel's mother and Grendel polluted the waters of the mere with blood, which were, however, soon cleansed by, or following, the melting of the giant sword (see below).

Admittedly, the Norse rune poems are attested only in manuscript texts much younger than *För Skirnis*. But that the Norse *þurs* was perceived long before, in early post-Conquest England, as a creature which caused a blood-related affliction is probably shown by the Old Danish *Canterbury Runic Charm*, preserved in a manuscript completed in 1073.¹⁵ A transliteration of its runes into normalized Old Norse reads:

Gyriḷ sárþvara, far þú nú, fundinn ertu. Þórr vígi þik, þursa dróttin, [G]yriḷ sárþvara. Við æðrafari.¹⁶

Gyriḷ sárþvara ['Gore-Smeared(?) of the wound-borer/shortsword'], go now, you are found! May Þórr 'consecrate' you, lord of giants, *Gyriḷ sárþvara*. Against veins' rushing/harm/pus.

Here the afflicting *þurs* 'giant' is called *Gyriḷ* of the *sárþvari* 'wound-borer/shortsword', the latter word being an otherwise unattested compound noun synonymous with the dwarf-name *Dolghvari* and the 'sword'-term *benþvari*.¹⁷ The combination of *Gyriḷ* (compare ON *gyrja* 'to gore') and a term for 'sword' in a remedy against a rushing of (i.e., gushing from?) the veins suggests a cure for profuse bleeding or bloody suppuration, one in which a hidden sword-bearing disease-giant is destroyed, implicitly by Þórr's fulgural hammer, a holy weapon of light; this weapon is similarly used to *vigja* 'consecrate' (i.e., kill) Þrymr, the *þursa dróttinn* 'lord of giants' of *Þrymskviða*.

15 On this text, see J. Frankis, 'Sidelights on post-Conquest Canterbury: Towards a Context for an Old Norse Runic Charm (DR 419)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 44 (2000), 1–27; McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion*, 127; A. Hall, '«Pur sarriþu þursa trutin»: Monster-Fighting and Medicine in Early Medieval Scandinavia', *Asclepio. Revista de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia* 61 (2009), 195–218; D. Taggart, *How Thor Lost his Thunder: The Changing Faces of an Old Norse God* (Abingdon, 2018), 167–9, 171–2.

16 McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 127.

17 On *þvari*, see *PTP*, 793.

Two variants of the *Canterbury Runic Charm* from Sigtuna, Sweden—a possibly late eleventh-century runic inscription on a copper amulet,¹⁸ and a runic inscription of similar date on a rib bone¹⁹—point to a cure for a fever associated with a wound. This has been taken to refer to a gangrenous wound, though a raised temperature may also accompany menstruation, as may a potentially very dangerous fever.

Beowulf and the Giant Sword as Purifiers

Skírnir's name suggests that he was a purifier. Beowulf certainly was. The Geat's aim in coming to Denmark was specifically *Heorot fælsian* 'to cleanse Heorot' (*Beowulf* 432) by killing Grendel, which he did: *hæfde þa gefælsod ... sele Hroðgares* 'he had then cleansed ... Hroðgar's hall' (825–6); *Heorot is gefælsod* 'Heorot is cleansed' (1176); *sele fælsode* 'he cleansed the hall' (2352).

Beowulf's giant sword, probably a solar weapon, also invites linkage with Skírnir. Our ultimate focus with regard to this weapon is its hilt, the golden plates(?) adorning which were *sciran* 'bright' (1694). This adjective, which also describes God, the *scir metod* 'bright Meter (of judgement upon Grendel)' (979), is cognate with ON *skírr* and therefore with *Skírnir*. If the purifying function of Skírnir is obscure in *För Skírnis*, it is explicit for Beowulf in relation to Heorot, as we have seen. It also seems clear, though not explicit, for the giant sword. After its blade had beheaded Grendel and then melted in Beowulf's hand, the mere's bloody, turbulent waters were *eal gefælsod* 'all cleansed' (1620). Specifically:

wæron yðgebland eal gefælsod,
 eacne eardas, þa se ellorgast
 oflet lifdagas ond þas lænan gesceaft. (1620–2)

the wave-blendings [i.e., turbulent waters] were all cleansed, the increased/immense estates, when the alien-spirit/guest relinquished life-days and this loaned/transitory/mutable/perishable creation.

18 McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 126–7; see also Hall, 'Þur sarriþu'.

19 H. Gustavson, 'Särfeberbenet från Sigtuna', *situne dei: Årsskrift för Sigtunaforskning* (2010), 61–76.

The wording of the last line seems carefully chosen. Although the words *þas lænan gesceaft* 'this loaned/transitory creation' undoubtedly denote principally 'this created world/life', they also invite secondary association with another loaned and relinquished creation, a conceptually living entity which has only just been described in a memorable image of transience. That creation is the giant sword, a *geworht* 'wrought' (1696) weapon of macrocosmic significance. Its blade, whose shining probably suggested the birth of a new day in the mere (cf. *lifdagas* 'life-days' here), has only just melted, inspiring a prominent image of the world's transience which also suggests the weapon's uncreation and the mere's resulting enlargement (*eacne*) with meltwater conceptually from the weapon's formerly 'enlarged/increased' state (*eacen* 1663, *eacnum ecgum* 'increased edges', 2140). Additionally, if my interpretation of the giant sword's history is correct, this weapon was only ever, in a sense, 'loaned' to the giants, who had stolen or arrogated it.²⁰

In light of the baptismal connotation of the name *Skírnir*, we may also recall the baptismal associations of the Beowulf's immersion in and emersion from the mere, together with the giant sword's subtle identification with a candle, perhaps even the Paschal Candle. Baptism, of course, is a sacrament of purification.

Additionally, our understanding of the giant sword as a purificatory weapon may be enriched by the aforementioned amulet from Sigtuna. A second runic inscription on the amulet's other side reads (in emended form and with normalized Old Norse spelling):

Haf þér þrjár þrár, úlfr!
 Haf þér níu nauðir, úlfr!
 iiii ísir, þurs! Íss! Ísir! Auk, [or ok] íss! Unir, úlfr!
 Njót lyfja.²¹

20 The quoted passage contains the first of four instances of *læne* 'loaned/transient/perishing' in *Beowulf*, all of which concern both a dead treasure-owner and his treasure. In line 1754, during the 'sermon' Hroðgar gives while gazing upon the hilt of the giant sword, he warns Beowulf that the *læne* body of the covetous man declines, leaving another man to distribute his treasure. In line 2845, after the deaths of Beowulf and the dragon, we hear, in the context of rusting treasures in the dragon's mound, that either had reached the end *lænan lifes* 'of loaned life'. In line 3129, we learn that these treasures lie *læne* in the mound, unguarded after the dragon's death.

21 Adapted from McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 126; see further MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, 118–21.

Have yourself three throes, wolf! Have yourself nine needs, wolf! Three ices, giant! Ice! Ices! Increase, [or 'and'] ice! May you enjoy, wolf! Use to heal [or 'Make use of the healing charms'].

It is natural to assume that these words, addressed with mock generosity to a disease-spirit described as both wolf and giant, remedy the same affliction as the charm on the other side. In that case, we have an invocation of the power of increasing 'ices'—possibly lengthening icicles (note the visual appearance of *iii*)—to cure a bloody wound-fever caused by a wolfish *þurs*. We might compare these to the icicles with which the blade of the rune-inscribed giant sword melted in the hot blood of Grendel's mother and her son, who are similarly wolfish *þyrs* 'giant'-monsters (OE *þyrs* and ON *þurs* are cognate). The Sigtuna amulet may help us perceive that, as Beowulf's sun-like giant sword burned and melted, its 'battle-icicles' fought the bloody heat and pollution of lupine giants.²²

Freyr as Thawer

The giant sword's melting provides another basis for linking this weapon with Freyr as a sun-controlling god, because, as we have seen, *Beowulf* draws an analogy between this dissolution and the loosening of frosty 'bonds', the unwinding of icy 'ropes' by a paternal deity (*fæder* 'father' 1609) during the spring thaw, when the sun strengthens (1607–11). Ostensibly, this paternal deity is the Judaeo-Christian God, but the description would also suit Freyr, a dynastic progenitor who *leysir ór hoptum hvern* 'loosens everyone from fetters' (*Lokasenna* 37). Furthermore, the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Gísla saga Súrssonar* 'Saga of Gísli Sursson' attributes Freyr the friendly power to prevent freezing, presumably due to his command of the sun:

Varð ok sá hlutr einn, er nýnæmum þótti gegna, at aldri festi snæ útan ok sunnan á haugi Þorgríms ok eigi fraus; ok gátu menn þess til, at hann myndi Frey svá ávarðr fyrir blótin, at hann myndi eigi vilja, at frøri á milli þeira.²³

22 Note also the 'Out fire, in frost' formula attested in English charms for burns from the fifteenth century onwards. J. Roper, *English Verbal Charms* (Helsinki, 2005), 116 claims it derives from 'a self-standing Old English (or more widespread Germanic) formula', but it is not found in surviving Old English records.

23 Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Vestfirðinga sögur*, ÍF 6 (Reykjavík, 1943), 57.

There also came to pass that unique thing, which seemed to amount to a novelty, that snow never settled outside and on the south side of Þorgrímr's grave-mound, and it did not freeze; and people guessed that was because he [i.e., Þorgrímr] would have been so dear to Freyr, on account of the sacrifices, that he [i.e., Freyr] would not wish that it should freeze between them.²⁴

A similar divine power is implicit in chapter 15 of the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Vatnsdæla saga* 'Saga of the People of Vatnsdalr', a story linked to the mythology of Freyr. *Ingimundr* 'Ingi-Hand/Protection' Þorsteinsson travelled from Norway to Iceland in pursuit of a figurine of Freyr, which had mysteriously disappeared from his possession and which, it was prophesied, now resided in Iceland in the place where he was destined to make his home; according to the king of Norway, it had been directed there by Freyr. Having temporarily stopped in a valley which seemed continually beset by a snowstorm, Ingimundr's men spotted fells to the north which were, by contrast, *snjólaus mjök* 'very snowless' and pleasing to look at. Ingimundr went there, found where the figurine lay buried, and set up home. He called his new farmstead *Hof* 'Temple'.²⁵

Additionally, such a power doubtless accounts for the replacement of snow and ice by a remarkable spell of fair weather in *Ögmundar þáttr dytts*. When the nominally Christian Gunnarr assumed Freyr's identity, *veðrit tók at birta* 'the weather began to brighten'.²⁶

To my knowledge, no medieval source attributes such power over both sun and ice to another Norse god.

24 Similarly, chapter 5 of *Ketils saga hængs* records that a viking king of Sweden and his men made heathen sacrifices at *Árhaugr* '(Good) Season Burial-Mound', on which no snow settled. Freyr is not named, but his involvement seems likely; *FSN*, II, 173–6.

25 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Vatnsdæla saga*, 40–2.

26 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eyfirðinga sögur*, 114.

10. Freyr, Heorot and the Hunt for the Solar Stag

Freyr's solar aspect informs his association with the stag, which he shares with Hroðgar chiefly through the latter's rulership of the hall *Heorot* 'Hart'. The present chapter explores this commonality, the existence of which increases the likelihood that swords wielded by Freyr and Hroðgar and their chief agents (Skírnir, Unferð and Beowulf) similarly have a solar aspect. I also examine in detail northern myths about the hunting of the sun by giant lupine creatures (and a small-looking dog), at least some of which have a lunar nature. By the end of this study, these celestial myths will, I hope, be seen to have an important bearing on the interpretation of Grendel's wolfish mother, her predatory son and their possession of the giant sword. The myths I examine in this chapter appear broadly comparable to a stag-hunting passage found immediately before Beowulf's discovery of the giant sword and beheading of the giants. Wordplay in this passage hints, I suggest, at the presence in the mere of the giant sword, and that the predatory giants had seized and kept it there wrongly.

Freyr, Beli and the Hart's Horn

Gylfaginning records that after giving his sword to Skírnir, Freyr was *vápnlauss er hann barðisk við Belja ok drap hann með hjartar horni* 'weaponless when he fought against Beli and he [i.e., Freyr] slew him with a hart's horn'.¹ Although Freyr is not explicitly cervine here, this was possibly originally a myth in which he and the giant *Beli* 'Bellower(?)' fought each other as antlered stags during the rut,² when male deer bellow and

1 *SnEGylf*, 31.

2 Tolley, *Shamanism*, I, 543–4.

lock antlers to deter rivals from their chosen females. If so, Freyr and Beli perhaps fought over a hind.³ Since *Völuspá* describes Beli's slayer as *bjartr* 'bright', we have reason to think that Freyr's solar aspect was prominent in this battle. His 'hart's horn'—his sword-substitute—would then probably be a solar antler, perhaps the very one we shall meet in Chapter 13.

Heorot, the Hart-Hall

Hroðgar is associated with a stag not only because he rules the hall called Heorot, but also because, as we have seen, he is implicitly identified with Heorot: he is the *eodor Ingwina* 'shelter of the Ing-friends' (1044). Furthermore, it is not only the hall's name that suggests an antlered stag. The hall is also described as *horngeap* 'horn-curved' (*Beowulf* 82) and a *hornreced* 'horn-house' (704)—terms usually assumed to refer to gables.⁴ Additionally, the hall has a *muða* 'mouth' (i.e., door) (724). It is easy to imagine Heorot decorated by tapestries or carvings representing deer, like the carvings which adorn the twelfth-century Urnes stave church in Norway.⁵

Additionally, there is reason to think that Heorot may have been surmounted by antlers, like the palace of the giant-slaying King David illustrated in the ninth-century *Utrecht Psalter*,⁶ a work thought to have been made near Reims c. 820 but which was in Canterbury by 1000. In the *Utrecht Psalter* this striking detail is doubtless the illustrator's

3 Later in this study I propose a curious equivalence between certain stags and certain dwarves, creatures related to giants.

4 See R. Cramp, 'The Hall in *Beowulf* and in Archaeology', in H. Damico and J. Leyerle (ed.), *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (Kalamazoo, 1993), 331–46 at 339. It is uncertain whether the description of Heorot as *banfag* 'bone-adorned' (780) refers to antler; see KB, 162.

5 See D. Lindholm and W. Roggenkamp, *Stave Churches in Norway: Dragon Myth and Christianity in Old Norwegian Architecture* (London, 1969), pl. 26, 28, 29. Bishop Aldhelm of Sherborne (died 709) reported that West Saxon Christian learning was conducted in buildings on the site of pagan shrines where small pillars of snake and stag (*cervulusque*) had once been worshipped; see HG, 51.

6 Folio 65v, <http://psalter.library.uu.nl/page?p=137&res=2&x=0&y=0>. See also the derived illustration in the early eleventh-century *Harley Psalter*: London, British Library MS Harley 603, fol. 57v; http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_603_fs001r. In Norse mythology, a stag called *Eikþyrnir* 'Oak-Thorned One'/'Oak-Antlered One' stood on the hall of Óðinn (*Grímnismál* 26), a god who shares more than one attribute with Freyr.

interpretation of the words *cornu eius exaltabitur in gloria* 'his horn will be exalted in glory' in *Psalms* 111:9. Other details in the same illustration are curiously suggestive of *Beowulf*. Near David's palace is a tree-bordered Hell, in which a devil armed with a trident stands before a group of flinching spearmen. The devil looks over his shoulder at three beggars next to him, who approach David in single file to request alms. The devil is presumably the illustrator's interpretation of verse 10's *peccator vibebit et irascetur* 'the transgressor/sinner will look and grow angry'. We may compare the proximity to Heorot of Grendel's hellish abode; Grendel's description as a sinful fiend; Grendel's hostility towards Heorot and its inhabitants; Grendel's arm, which, though not a trident, is forked and tipped with metal points;⁷ and the *Gar-Dene* 'Spear-Danes' whom Grendel brought to his lair, apparently along paths restricted to a single file (*Beowulf* 1410). Since the psalm's fourth verse observes that *exortum est in tenebris lumen rectis* 'a light is arisen in darkness for the upright/righteous', radiance seems implicitly attributed to the exalted stag's head. In that case we may compare Heorot's radiance (noted below) and the light which appears in the mere when God grants the upstanding Beowulf victory over Grendel's mother in the giants' lair.⁸

Heorot is strongly suggestive of a solar hall, which would be a perfect residence for devotees of a stag-god with solar power. It was in Heorot that a poet sang, early in *Beowulf*, of God's establishment *sunnan ond monan* 'of sun and moon' (94) as *leoman to leohte landbuendum* 'luminaries as light for land-dwellers' (95). Additionally, Heorot is a *goldsele* 'gold-hall' (715, 1253, 1639, 2083), a *beorhte bold* 'bright building' (997), a *beahsele beorhta* 'bright ring-hall' (1177). It is the most famous hall *under roderum* 'under the skies', a *hof... torht* 'bright house',⁹ from which *lixte se leoma ofer lande fela* 'the light shone over many lands' (309–13), the hall being *on heahstede* 'in a high place' (285). It is surely no coincidence that, similarly, *lixte se leoma* 'the light shone' like the sun in Grendel's lair (1570).

7 Cf. the various fork-wielders whom I shall relate to Grendel later in this study.

8 Also noteworthy is the Cross surmounting the right-hand part of David's palace in the *Utrecht Psalter*. Its presence there implies an equivalence with the antlered stag's head, from which it is separated by the radiant hand of God. This detail is especially relevant to the symbolism of the Old Norse poem *Sólarljóð* discussed in Chapter 13.

9 OE *torht* can describe the brightness of the sun and heavens; cf. *wuldortorhtan weder* 'gloriously bright weather' (1136). Note also Beowulf's *headotorht* 'battle-bright' warcry directed at the fiery dragon (2553).

That Heorot probably shone like the sun partly reflects the nature of its roof, which was *goldfah* (308), *golde fahne* (927) ‘adorned/shining with gold’, these descriptions perhaps referring to gilded sheets or shingles¹⁰—and/or to golden antlers. Heorot’s radiance is increased by that of its *frea*, Hroðgar, who is *glædman* and *glædne* ‘bright, cheerful, gracious’ (367, 863), a leader of *Beorht-Dene* ‘Bright-Danes’ (427, 609), *glæde Scyldingas* ‘bright Scyldingas’ (58), the oldest meaning of *glæd* being ‘shining’.¹¹

Finally, a specific parallel exists between Heorot’s wide-ranging radiance and freedom from *facenstafas* ‘deceit-staves’ (1018)¹² and the site of a radiant hall of Norse mythology. *Breiðablik* ‘Broad-Shining’ was the name of the land, located by Snorri *á himni* ‘in the sky’,¹³ where Baldr had built his halls, and where the poet of *Grímnismál* 12 declares *ek liggja veit / fæsta feiknstafi* ‘I know fewest deceit-staves lie’.¹⁴ I consider this no chance similarity, especially as Richard North argues for close links between Baldr and Yngvi-Freyr; indeed, he claims that ‘Baldr seems to have developed as a variant of Ingvi-freyr’.¹⁵

The ‘Hunted Hart’ Passage in *Beowulf*

Given Heorot’s cervine identification, it is unlikely to be fortuitous that the only other reference to a stag in *Beowulf* appears in Hroðgar’s description—spoken within Heorot—of the mere, shortly before Beowulf dives into it to behead Grendel’s mother and Grendel with the giant sword:

10 Cramp, ‘Hall in *Beowulf*’, 339–40.

11 See KB, 386; R. L. Schichler, ‘*Glæd man* at Heorot: *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon Psalter’, *LSE* 27 (1996), 49–68 at 50–51.

12 Presumably a term for malicious or treacherous deeds.

13 *SnEGylf*, 23.

14 The same term recurs in *Sólarljóð* 60 in association with heathen stellar radiance and the damned dead: *heiðnar stjörnur stóðu yfir höfði þeim / fúðar feiknstöfum* ‘heathen stars stood over their heads, coloured with deceit-staves’; Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 338. For the observation of an implicit contrast with the *hreindir kyndlar* ‘pure candles’ that *brendir bjartliga* ‘were being burned brightly’ over the heads of virtuous men in *Sólarljóð* 69, see G. Tate, ‘“*Heiðar stjörnur*” / “*heiðnar stjörnur*”’: The Confrontation of Paganism and Christianity in *Sólarljóð*’, in J. Louis-Jensen, C. Sanders and P. Springborg (ed.), *The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28.7–28.8 1985: Workshop Papers I–II*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1985), II, 1021–35 at 1031–2.

15 HG, 129. For a parallel to Heorot as golden, heavenly hall in Iranian myth, see C. Monette, ‘Heroes and Hells in *Beowulf*, the *Shahnameh*, and the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*’, *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 36 (2008), 99–147 at 120–3; C. Monette, *The Medieval Hero: Christian and Muslim Traditions* (Saarbrücken, 2008), 165–8.

'Deah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,
 heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece,
 feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
 aldor on ofre, ær he in wille
 hafelan *hydan*;¹⁶ nis þæt heoru stow!' (1368–72)

'Although the heath-stepper harassed by hounds, the hart with strong horns, may seek the copse-wood, put to flight from afar, he gives up his life/body before, his life on the shore [or 'the lord, on the shore'], before he will go in [i.e., into the mere] to hide his head; that is not a pleasant place!'

The *heorot* harassed by hounds mirrors *Heorot* attacked by wolfish giants. Additionally, the hart's overwhelming aversion to the mere prefigures the revulsion doubtless felt by Hroðgar and his men when they approached the same place, which was not far from Heorot (1361–2).¹⁷ There it was that they discovered the head of Æschere (1420–21), the warrior and councillor of Heorot with whom Hroðgar recalls having *hafelan weredon* 'defended (their) heads' (1327).

Furthermore, as Robert Schichler has observed, the hart in this passage is suggestive of references to harts in the psalms, and of illustrations of harts in early psalters, such as the *Utrecht Psalter*. Schichler observes that 'the psalter representations of the hart—variously identified with the Psalmist, the just man at his house, and the Lord Triumphant—help to dispel the ambiguity surrounding modern interpretations of the hart image in *Beowulf*, illuminating favourably the intentions and activities of Hrothgar at Heorot.'¹⁸

16 The verb is missing from the manuscript. I supply *hydan* following various previous editions (e.g., *ASPR* 4). *KB*, 48, however, emends *hafelan* [*beorgan*] 'to protect its head'. I favour *hafelan* [*hydan*] as these words find exact parallel in line 446. There *Beowulf* observes that there will be no need for Hroðgar to 'hide [i.e., bury] his head' if Grendel defeats him, as the monster will take him back to the mere to eat. Also, in view of the emphatic 'h'-alliteration in lines 1368–9, it is attractive to conclude this passage similarly. However, for a recent argument for a different emendation, to *hafelan hafene* 'with its head raised', see T. Porck and B. Bossenbroek, 'A Hart with Its Head Held High: a New Emendation for *Beowulf*, Line 1372a', *ANQ* (14 February 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2019.1579082>. Whichever emendation is adopted, this passage flirts with the image of a stag's antlered head in the mere.

17 There is a likely double meaning in *aldor* (1371), a word that means both 'life' and 'lord' in *Beowulf*. The Danes' (*e*)*aldor* 'lord' is Hroðgar (*aldre* 346, *ealdre* 592, *aldor* 668). Cf. the *aldorlease* 'lordless/lifeless' (15) state of the Danes at the start of the poem, which the *Liffrea* 'Life-Lord' (16) remedied by granting them Beow. See further S. L. Higley, 'Aldor on Ofre, or the Reluctant Hart: a Study of Liminality in "Beowulf"', *NM* 87 (1986), 342–53.

18 Schichler, 'Glæd man', 59–60.

As others have noted, among the possible allusions to Biblical harts in the quoted passage is an inverse reference to the opening of *Psalms 41*, *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus* 'As a hart longs for water-sources, so longs my soul for thee, O God',¹⁹ which is among the Easter prayers in the eleventh-century *Missal of Robert of Jumièges*.²⁰ This possibility is strengthened by the content of subsequent verses of the same psalm, in which the psalmist is engulfed by violent waters, attacked by foes and temporarily downcast, before reaffirming his faith in his saviour, God. Similarly, Beowulf was engulfed by the turbulent waters of the mere, attacked by foes and temporarily overthrown by Grendel's mother, before being saved by God (1554–6, 1657–64). Additionally, the psalmist's agonized question *quare oblitus es mei* 'why have you forgotten me?' prefigures that of Christ on the Cross, an event evoked during Beowulf's time in the mere by the poet's observation *Da com non dæg* 'Then had come [or "came"] the ninth hour of the day' (1600), the time of Christ's death.

Beowulf's stag-hunt is also interpretable as a symbol of the wolfish Devil's pursuit of Christ, who was often symbolized in medieval bestiaries and art by a stag,²¹ and who gave up his life before visiting Hell during the Harrowing. At the same time, the passage is suggestive of the Devil's pursuit of the Christian soul.²²

More significantly for our immediate purpose, the stag-hunt passage may, from a different perspective, represent another instance of the poet's veiling of a Germanic myth—a myth extant in various forms in other texts. Before examining this myth's surviving forms, however, we should note that the passage quoted above embeds in the listener's subconscious the half-formed image of a strongly antlered head, which, despite the stag's aversion, is hidden in Grendel's mere. The poet, I suggest, thereby subtly prepares listeners for the discovery therein of a related or equivalent weapon, the sun-like giant sword, of which only its head—a hilt potentially made partly of antler—eventually remains, and which probably does not belong there.

19 D. W. Robinson, Jr., 'The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach through Symbolism and Allegory', *Speculum* 26 (1951), 24–49, at 33–4; Lee, *Guest-Hall*, 210.

20 Wilson, *Missal*, 93.

21 See Chapter 13.

22 Cf. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 174.

Wordplay may strengthen this implied connection, even if Hroðgar was unconscious of it. Coming shortly before the discovery of the giant sword in the mere and shortly after a reference to the *heorot*, the words *nis þæt heoru stow* ‘that is not a pleasant place’ tease the ear. Especially following the earlier wordplay of *unheoru* ‘unpleasant/un-sword’ (987), these words may subtly suggest the following senses to an alert listener (especially one familiar with this story or similar ones), any of which might raise a wry smile:

- (a) **nis þæt heorustow* ‘that is not a sword-place’. This could intimate any or all of the following senses: ‘that is no place for a sword’, hinting at the wrongfulness of the giants’ possession of such a weapon; ‘that is not a place where your sword works’, as Beowulf finds out when Hrunting fails for the first time in its career; ‘that is not a place where you find or use swords’, which would be misleading and therefore increase the surprise at the giant sword’s discovery and success; ‘that is not a place where they use swords’, which is true (if Grendel’s mother’s *seax* is considered a knife).
- (b) **nis þæt heora stow* ‘that is not a sword’s place’.²³
- (c) **nis þæt heora stow* ‘that is not a place of swords’. Beowulf finds only *one* sword therein.
- (d) **nis þæt heorutstow* ‘that is not a hart-place’.²⁴

Although **heorustow* ‘sword-place’ is unattested, *heoru* often appears as the first element of compounds, such as *heorosweng* ‘sword-stroke’ (1590) and *heorudreore/heorodreore* ‘sword/battle-blood’ (487, 849).²⁵

23 The genitive singular of *heoru* ‘sword’ is not attested, but A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959, corr. rpt. 1977), §614 states that this noun declines like *sunu* ‘son’, which has genitive singular *suna*.

24 Medieval tradition sometimes imagined Cain as horned or even specifically antlered (see Chapter 14). The *Beowulf*-poet’s rich ambiguity is such that we might therefore also entertain thoughts of Beowulf as a *wulf* ‘wolf’ who hunts Grendel (a horned devil?) and his mother, descendants of Cain.

25 On the fading of the literal meaning ‘sword’ for *heoru(-)* in surviving Old English poetry, see Cronan, ‘Poetic Words’, 31–2. For a detailed study of this word, see Teresi, ‘Old English Term *Heoru*’. Old Norse has a cognate poetic term for ‘sword’, *hjorr*; see Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 51; also *PTP*, 790, for its occurrence in a list of ‘sword’-terms in which it immediately precedes and alliterates with *Hrotti* (cf. OE *Hrunting*).

There is no attested **heorutstow* ‘hart-place’ either, but *heorut/heorot* ‘hart’ also appears as the first element of compounds, albeit only outside *Beowulf*: for example, *heorotsmeoru* ‘hart-fat’ and *heorotsol* ‘stag’s wallowing-place’.²⁶ Apart from the immediate context, it is only the metre’s requirement for a long initial syllable in the penultimate word of the quoted passage that secures its primary sense as ‘pleasant’.

Support for this proposal of an implied link between the strong-antlered stag and a sword in *Beowulf*’s hunting passage comes from other texts and archaeological discoveries from Anglo-Saxon England and medieval Iceland and Scandinavia. They indicate conceptual equivalences and material links between antlers and swords.²⁷

We saw earlier that, according to Snorri, when Freyr was without his sword he instead used an antler to kill Beli. This substitution may have been influenced not just by the basic facts that antlers and swords are both piercing weapons and that sword-handles often incorporated animal horn antler (sometimes antler),²⁸ but also by the similarity of antlers and swords to twigs and by their shared association with wood. Both antlers and swords are, like twigs, slender, branched objects, which sometimes break; stags rub their antlers against tree trunks;²⁹ and swords, which often had wood in their handles, were drawn from scabbards made mainly of wood; some swords were even made wholly of wood.³⁰ We have already encountered likely twig-swords in the *gambanteinn*, *Lævateinn* and the weapon of the wood-creature Mimingus; I shall adduce others later.

26 For the latter word, see *BT* s.v. *sol*; J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edn. (Toronto, 1960, rpt. 1991), s.v. *heorotsol*.

27 In addition to the evidence adduced below, note *Riddle 88* of the *Old English Exeter Book*, in which an inkhorn probably refers to its former existence as one of a pair of antlers used as weapons by a stag.

28 For a Viking Age sword-hilt guard made of elk-antler, found at Sigtuna, Sweden, see Graham-Campbell and Kidd, *Vikings*, 168–9. A. MacGregor, *Bone, Antler, Ivory and Horn: The Technology of Skeletal Materials Since the Roman Period* (Abingdon, 2015), 165 observes that although grips made from antler or bone ‘seem to have maintained only limited popularity beyond the end of the Roman period, finds of pommels and guards are rather more numerous’. The same writer observes that ‘an overwhelming number’ of Anglo-Saxon tools and weapons were hafted with animal horn, as distinct from antler, in A. MacGregor, ‘Bone, Antler and Horn: An Archaeological Perspective’, *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 2 (1990), 29–38 at 32.

29 Additionally, on links between deer and trees in Old Norse mythology, see Heide, ‘*Fjølsvinnsmál*’, 101–9.

30 See Chapter 3 n. 50.

The Old English *Prose Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* features a unique, golden, sword-like weapon with a *leoma* 'light' of supremely radiant purity belonging to a personification of the Pater Noster. It is compared with the sharpness of the tined iron horns of imaginary wild beasts, evidently fabulous stags:

Ond on ðæs Pater Nosters ðære swiðran handa is gyldennes sweordes onlicnis, ðæt is eallum oðrum wæpnum ungelic. His leoma he is hlutra ond beorhtra ðonne ealra heofona tungol, oððe on ealre eorðan sien goldes ond seolfres frætwednessa ond fægernessa. Ond ðæs dryhtenlican wæpnes seo swiðre ecglast, he is mildra ond gemetfæstra ðonne ealles middangeardes swetnissa oððe his stencas. Ond seo wynstre ecglast ðæs ilcan wæpnes, he is reðra ond scearpra ðonne eall middangeard, ðeah he sie binnan his feower hwommum full gedrifen wildeora, ond anra gehwylc deor hæbbe synderlic . xii . hornas ierene, ond anra gehwylc horn hæbbe . xii . tindas ierene, ond anra gehwylc tind hæbbe synderlice . xii . ordas, ond anra gehwylc sie . xii . ðusendum siða scearpra ðonne seo an flan ðe sie fram hundtwelftigum hyrdenna geondhyrded.³¹

And in the right hand of the Pater Noster is the likeness of a golden sword, which is unlike all other weapons. Its light, it is purer and brighter than all the heavenly bodies, or if there were adornments and beautiful things of gold and silver in all the earth. And the right edge-track [i.e., edge] of this lordly weapon, it is milder and more moderate than the sweetnesses of all middle-earth or its scents. And the left edge-track of the same weapon, it is fiercer and sharper than all middle-earth, even if wild beasts were driven within its four corners to the fullest extent, and each beast individually were to have twelve iron horns, and each horn twelve tines, and each tine individually twelve points, and each [tine] were twelve thousand times sharper than one arrow thoroughly hardened from one hundred and twenty hardenings.

A c. 700 Anglo-Saxon sword taken from the Thames has what is thought to be a golden deer stamped into its blade.³² Anglo-Saxon swords and seaxes also survive with handles and hilts made partly from animal horn.³³ A notable example is a possibly seventh-century sword-hilt,

31 Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, 74, 76; Anlezark translates *His leoma* as 'His light', not 'Its light'.

32 See R. A. S[mith], 'Anglo-Saxon Sword with Stamps', *British Museum Quarterly* 4 (1930), 109.

33 SASE, 58, 62, 157; SASE5-7, 180; G. Drinkall and M. Foreman, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Castledyke South, Barton-on-Humber* (Sheffield, 1998), 248; I. Meadows, *The*

thought to have been discovered in Cumberland, which bears gold panels, like Beowulf's giant sword.³⁴ Some early Scandinavian swords also have handles of bone and ivory.³⁵

Norse sagas mention swords with hilts made at least partly of horn, though without specifying which type of animal this material came from.³⁶ Most interesting are references to the sword *Hornhjalti* 'Horn-Hilt' in the fourteenth-century Icelandic *Gull-Þóris saga* 'Saga of Gold-Þórir'³⁷ and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* 'Saga of Hálfðan Eysteinnsson'.³⁸ This sword was greatly ornamented in gold and never failed in its blow. Although its provenance is not explicit, *Hornhjalti* was probably among the swords that Þórir, the *manna mestr* 'greatest of men' and the *sterkastr jafngamall* 'strongest of those of equal age',³⁹ took from a cave of dragons, which in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* is located below a waterfall, in an episode recognized as being analogous to Beowulf's adventure in the mere.⁴⁰

Together, this Anglo-Saxon and Norse evidence of links between swords and horned beasts, including stags, encourages the perception of wordplay on *heoru-* 'sword' and *heorut-* 'hart' in *Beowulf's* stag-hunt passage. The analogous references to the sword *Hornhjalti* also provide a basis for thinking that the giant sword's hilt may have been made partly from animal horn, perhaps antler. If so, the gold-plated hilt that Beowulf presented to Hroðgar in his stag-hall might have been, in essence, a gold-plated antler.

The Solar Stag in Early Europe

Apart from these implied links with Heorot, Hroðgar and the giant sword, is there any other reason to think that *Beowulf's* stag-hunt may have a solar aspect? There is indeed, as it would be in keeping with

Pioneer Burial: A High-Status Anglian Warrior Burial from Wollaston Northamptonshire (Oxford, 2019), 36.

34 E. Blakelock, A. Mongiatti and S. La Niece, *Scientific Investigation of an Anglo-Saxon Sword Hilt from Cumberland (1876,0717.1)* (unpublished British Museum Department of Conservation and Scientific Research, report no. AR2012-211, 2013).

35 H. Shetelig and H. Falk, *Scandinavian Archaeology* (Oxford, 1937), 377–8.

36 *SASE*, 181. Generally on the sword-hilt in Old Norse literature, see *SASE*, 177–86.

37 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 203, 211.

38 *FSN*, IV, 283–5; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 52.

39 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 178, 181.

40 Garmonsway and Simpson, *Beowulf*, 324–7.

mythological traditions about stags and stag-hunts attested from early Europe, including pre-Conquest England and, more clearly, Scandinavia. The following detailed review of some of these traditions will support this claim. It will also introduce a major theme of subsequent chapters, namely the predation of lunar creatures, often wholly or partly lupine, on the sun, which was sometimes imagined as a stag. We shall see in due course that such predators may well be present at the heart of *Beowulf* in the form of Grendel and his mother, their prey being Heorot, the sun-like stag-hall, and its bright inhabitants. These findings will suggest the potential importance of solar and lunar traditions to *Beowulf*, and more specifically to the nature and interpretation of the probably sun-like giant sword and its possession by nocturnal giants.

Surviving art and artefacts make it clear that the concept of a solar stag was widespread among ancient European peoples.⁴¹ This notion presumably stemmed from three main observations:

- (a) The sun's 'horned' appearance during some solar eclipses.⁴²
- (b) The occasional sight of a 'horned' circumzenithal arc (which resembles an upside-down, smiling rainbow) above the sun, especially in atmospheric conditions when threatening 'sun-dogs' may also flank the sun as if encircling their prey.⁴³
- (c) The vigorous growth of new antlers in spring and summer, the seasons when the sun's strength returns and grows.⁴⁴

41 It is, however, absent from H. R. E. Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions* (Manchester, 1988).

42 For a photograph of this phenomenon, see <http://www.atoptics.co.uk/atoptics/sunecl.htm>. For an interpretation of the name of Baldr's ship, *Hringhorni* 'Ring-Horned One', as an image of such an eclipse, see Bjorn Jonsson, *Star Myths of the Vikings: A New Concept of Norse Mythology* (Manitoba, 1994), 126 and 127, fig. 34. This appearance might also have inspired association of the sun with other horned animals, such as the bull and the ram; for bull-symbolism, see J. R. Conrad, *The Horn and the Sword: The History of the Bull as Symbol of Power and Fertility* (London, 1959). Additionally, the horned moon was associated with horned creatures, as in the Old English riddle discussed in Chapter 11.

43 See 'Circumzenithal arc', in *Wikipedia* (19 December 2018), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumzenithal_arc; <http://www.atoptics.co.uk/halo/czaform.htm>; and D. Eggert, 'Display from Achsheim' (27 January 2012), <http://www.thehalovault.org/2012/01/display-from-achsheim.html>. I return to the phenomenon of sun-dogs (parhelion, plural parhelia) below.

44 D. Gricourt and D. Hollard, *Cernunnos, le dioscore sauvage: Recherches comparatives sur la divinité dionysiaque des Celtes* (Paris, 2010), 122, amid a discussion of the solar stag and related concepts (122–32).

Miranda Green observes that evidence for the ‘visual association between sun and stag begins in the Neolithic’ in an Iberian passage grave, on which is carved ‘a stag with its head in the form of a rayed sun associated with two other sun-images’.⁴⁵ She goes on to identify other Iberian examples from the Neolithic, including a combination of antlers with a solar symbol. More immediately interesting for this investigation is her observation that:

[I]t is in the Bronze Age rock-art of north Italy and Scandinavia that stag and sun appear, from the imagery, to have been closely integrated in a consistent fashion. Stags pull sun-discs, like a horse drawing a cart, in Bohuslän, and suns and stags frequently occur together at Camonica. But even more evocative of the intense association is where antlers and sun are fused to form a solar-deer image. This happens at Kyrkestigen, Svenneby, in southern Sweden where stags are depicted with their antlers meeting in a rayed solar circle. In the same area is the image of a stag in a ship with its antlers again curling together in a sun-symbol ...⁴⁶

Bronze Age Anatolia supplies further likely examples. Among the treasures found in royal tombs at Alaca Höyük are figures of large-antlered stags, adorned with gold and silver, and marked with circular symbols, probably of solar significance.⁴⁷

In the Iron Age, an instance of a celestial stag, solar or lunar (or both), appears on a bronze coin minted by the Ambiani of the Somme Valley in southern France. Dating from c. 60–50 BC, and found near St. Albans in England, its reverse shows a large-antlered stag with a likely representation of the sun or moon between its legs. A series of smaller circles leads from the sun or moon around the right side and top of the coin, presumably tracing a passage across the sky. Circles close to the antlers suggest radiance, and, together with another circle forming

45 Green, *Sun-Gods*, 55.

46 Green, *Sun-Gods*, 55. On the interpretation of prehistoric Scandinavian rock-art in light of solar myth, see also K. Kristiansen, ‘Rock Art and Religion: The Sun Journey in Indo-European Mythology and Bronze Age Rock Art’, in A. C. Fredell, K. Kristiansen, and F. Criado (ed.), *Representations and Communications: Creating an Archaeological Matrix of Late Prehistoric Rock Art* (Oxford, 2010), 93–115. On the artistic realization of the solar stag in early Siberia, see A. I. Martynov, ‘The Solar Cult and the Tree of Life’, *Arctic Anthropology* 25 (1988), 12–29.

47 See, for example, N. Thierry, ‘Le culte du cerf en Anatolie et la Vision de saint Eustathe’, *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot* 72 (1991), 33–100 at 67 fig. 6.

the stag's chest, presumably indicate either a solar stag or a lunar stag sporting with radiance taken from the sun.⁴⁸ The coin's obverse almost certainly shows a 'Cernunnos'-head with a large ring suspended from either ear, Cernunnos being a deity closely associated with the stag. Most famously, he appears as an antlered figure beside a large-antlered stag on the Gundestrup Cauldron, found in a bog in Northern Jutland, where he probably represents the Thracian Orpheus.⁴⁹ He reappears on a silver coin found at Petersfield, Hampshire, which was perhaps minted by immigrants fleeing the Gallic War. One side of this coin, which dates from c. AD 20, shows a horse surrounded by likely solar symbols. The other side shows an antlered Cernunnos-head surrounded by similar symbols. A 'spoked wheel'-symbol sits between the god's antlers and attached to the top of his head by a short 'ladder'. This symbol, which effectively functions as the god's third, central antler, may be compared to the wheel of the Celtic thunder-god Taranis or, I suggest, identified as the sun.⁵⁰

It is possible, therefore, that, even if from no other source than the observation of ancient art and artefacts, the solar stag was known in early medieval northern Europe. But a well-known literary source would also have encouraged the idea. Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (8.117) records a belief that stags hardened their antlers *solis vapore* 'in the sun's heat'.⁵¹ In any case, surviving literature and archaeology indicates that, from whatever source, the concept of the solar stag was probably part of both Christian and heathen tradition in medieval Scandinavia and pre-Conquest England.⁵²

48 See Chris Rudd *List* 74 (March 2004), 11; S. Lilly, *Ancient Celtic Coin Art* (Glastonbury, 2008), 56. Cf. the lunar creature with stolen sunlight between its horns in the Old English riddle examined in Chapter 11.

49 See F. Kaul, I. Marazov, J. Best and N. de Vries, *Thracian Tales on the Gundestrup Cauldron* (Amsterdam, 1991), 81, 87–8, with figs. 6, 10, 22.

50 On this coin, see G. C. Boon, 'A Coin with the Head of the Cernunnos', *Seaby Coin and Medal Bulletin* 769 (1982), 276–82; M. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London, 1992), 231–2 with fig. 8.20; C. Rudd, 'Horned God or Druid Priest?', *Chris Rudd List* 103 (January 2009), 2–5 with figs. 1, 2. Ladders are associated with the sun in Bronze Age iconography; see Cahill, 'Here Comes the Sun ...'. With the position of the coin's wheel, compare the solar vessel between the lunar creature's horns in the Old English riddle examined in Chapter 11, and the crucifix between a stag's antlers in the legend of St. Eustace mentioned in Chapter 13.

51 H. Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History with an English Translation in Ten Volumes*, 2nd edn., 10 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983), III, 84.

52 There is no mention of it, however, in a recent survey of the stag in Anglo-Saxon tradition in P. Mortimer and S. Pollington, *Remaking the Sutton Hoo Stone: The*

An explicitly solar stag appears in stanza 55 of the thirteenth(?)-century Eddic poem *Sólarljóð*, in an image which, like many others in the poem, ‘clearly partakes of Christian and indigenous mythological associations’.⁵³

Sólar hjört leit ek sunnan fara;
hann teymðu tveir saman;
fætr hans stóðu foldu á,
en tóku horn til himins.

The sun’s hart I saw journey from the south;⁵⁴ two together led him by the rein/bridle; his feet stood on the earth, but his horns reached to heaven.

This hart principally symbolizes Christ, who was also commonly identified with the sun, though the identities of the creature’s leaders are uncertain.⁵⁵ One of its antlers, most likely inscribed with runes, probably appears subsequently in the poem symbolizing at once a sunbeam, the Cross and the Word of God (see Chapter 13).

Older evidence indicates that such a creature, or similar, was probably also present in heathen Norse tradition.⁵⁶

Two bronze figures of horned animals from Solberga (*sol-* ‘sun’), Öland, Sweden encourage this conclusion. They date from the third to

Ansell-Roper Replica and Its Context (Ely, 2013), 109–16. For early Chinese and Etruscan instances, see Suhr, ‘Interpretation’, 97, 102; for a Greek instance, see E. G. Suhr, ‘The Griffon and the Volcano’, *Folklore* 78 (1967), 212–24 at 221; for possible instances in much later European tales, including one in *Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (no. 163 ‘The Glass Coffin’), see Suhr, ‘Maerchen’, 279.

53 Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 335.

54 Similarly, the stag on the Gosforth Cross appears on the monument’s south face (see below).

55 See Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 335. If Ing leads the solar wagon in the *Old English Rune Poem*, perhaps they are Yngvi-Freyr and Skirnir, or Yngvi-Freyr and Freyja.

56 W. Schultz, ‘Bemerkungen zum Sonnenhirsch und Opferhirsch’, in P. Grimm (ed.), *Varia Archaeologica, Wilhelm Unverzagt zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht* (Berlin, 1964), 435–9 at 435 claims there is no trace of the concept of the solar stag in late Norse heathen tradition. Similarly, F. Amory, ‘Norse-Christian Syncretism and *interpretatio christiana* in *Sólarljóð*’, in J. Louis-Jensen, C. Sanders and P. Springborg (ed.), *The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28.7–28.8 1985: Workshop Papers I–II*, 2 vols (Copenhagen, 1985), I, 1–25 at 9–10, 15 denies any heathen-Christian syncretism in *Sólarljóð*’s solar stag; as ‘no stag cult existed in medieval Iceland’, he sees it as a purely Christian creation from diverse ‘literary, legendary, and biblical materials’. The Gosforth Cross contradicts Schultz’s view, however, and no ‘stag cult’ is necessary for the preservation of an ancient image.

the fifth century AD and may be interpreted as solar beasts, possibly horned horses.⁵⁷

The second of two early fifth-century gold-plated horns found at Gallehus, Southern Jutland seems likely to have depicted a solar hart.⁵⁸ Both horns were melted down in the early nineteenth century, but surviving drawings record that Horn B bore, in addition to a maker's runic inscription in Proto-Norse and other pictorial designs, a scene featuring an antlered stag surrounded by wolves, on either side of which stood a horned humanoid, one with a large ring, the other with a sickle. Since this scene also features stars, the stag, one of whose antlers touches a star, presumably had celestial significance; it seems likely to have been a solar stag hunted by wolves in an eclipse-scene.⁵⁹ This impression is bolstered by the pair of flanking humanoids (the Heavenly Twins?), whose ring and sickle are suggestive of the sun and/or a crescent moon; despite the large chronological gaps, it is tempting to relate them to the pair of figures who flank a stag on a c. 600 BC bronze wagon from Strettweg, Austria, each of which holds one of the stag's exaggeratedly large antlers,⁶⁰ as well as to the unnamed pair who led the solar hart in *Sólarljóð*. Possibly also eclipse-scenes are the same Gallehus horn's depictions of an archer shooting a deer as it suckles a calf, and of a tricephalous, axe-wielding giant pulling a horned deer by a leash attached to its foreleg, against which the deer rears up; both are also set among stars.

57 See Andén, *Tracing*, 159–61. Also noteworthy are twenty-six gilded wooden stags from Filippovka, Orenburg, Russia, which were found in a burial-mound in a cemetery dating from the fifth or fourth century BC; see G. Windfuhr, 'The Stags of Filippovka: Mithraic Coding on the Southern Ural Steppes', in J. Aruz, A. Farkas and E. V. Fino (ed.), *The Golden Deer of Eurasia: Perspectives on the Steppe Nomads of the Ancient World* (New Haven, 2006), 46–81, especially 54–5.

58 For illustrations, and for a bold interpretation of the horns as objects created in response to a total solar eclipse of 413 AD, see W. Hartner, *Die Goldhörner von Gallehus* (Wiesbaden, 1969). Hartner's views were received enthusiastically by some, sceptically by others; see, for example, A. Beer, 'Hartner and the Riddle of the Golden Horns', *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 1 (1970), 139–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002182867000100204>; R. W. V. Elliott's review in *MÆ* 40 (1971), 176–9; and H. A. T. Reiche's review in *Isis* 64 (1973), 236–9.

59 Cf. Schultz, 'Bemerkungen', 437; Hartner, *Goldhörner*, 62–3. On the visibility of certain stars and planets during total solar eclipses, see F. Krojer, *Astronomie der Spätantike, die Null und Aryabhata* (Munich, 2009), 133–40.

60 Photographed in Schultz, 'Bemerkungen', Tafel 74a.

The likelihood of a heathen Norse stag of heavenly radiance is strengthened by a stanza from the Eddic *Helgakviða Hundingsbana ǫnnur* ‘Second Lay of Helgi, Slayer of Hundings’, although Christian influence on this poem is conceivable:⁶¹

‘Svá bar Helgi af hildingum
sem ítrskapaðr askr af þyrni,
eða sá dýrkálfr, döggu slunginn,
er ǫfri ferr ǫllum dýrum
ok horn glóa við himin sjálfan.’ (38)

‘Thus *Helgi* “Holy One” surpassed (other) warriors, as nobly shaped ash (surpasses) thorn, or the deer-calf, drenched in dew, which walks superior to all beasts, and whose horns glow against heaven itself.’

The reference to dew, together with the glowing horns, probably identifies this young stag with the early morning sun. In Chapter 13 we shall later encounter Helgi’s namesake and ‘kind of doublet’,⁶² Helgi Hjörvarðsson, overcoming a hostile, probably lunar giantess by striking her with deadly solar staves.

Samsons saga fagra, which admittedly is a late medieval text, contains a further instance of a solar stag: *Samson sér einn fagran hjört í einu rjóðri, svo aldri sá hann annan slíkan. Sýndist honum geislar standa af hans hornum* ‘Samson sees a fair hart in a clearing, such that he never saw another such. It seemed to him that (sun)beams emanated from its horns’.⁶³ It appears that this stag was actually a shape-shifted *klókur dvergur* ‘cunning dwarf’, or at least that it was conjured by him; we shall return to him in Chapter 12.

In my view, though, the most important evidence for the solar stag’s presence in heathen Norse tradition, and for its accommodation within Christianity, survives in carvings on the tenth-century Anglo-Norse Gosforth Cross in Cumbria. Amid other scenes depicting events at or connected with Ragnarǫk (most of which show no obvious distortion by Christianity), this remarkable monument shows an antlered stag being

61 See M. Bampi, ‘“Gǫfuct dýr ec heiti”: Deer Symbolism in Sigurðr Fáfnisbani?’, in A. Ney, H. Williams and F. C. Ljungqvist (ed.), *Á austvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*, 2 vols (Gävle, 2009), I, 78–84 at 82.

62 C. Larrington (trans.), *The Poetic Edda*, rev. edn. (Oxford, 2014), 119.

63 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, III, 369.

pursued by a wolf identifiable as the monstrous Fenrir, devourer of the sun. I examine this matter in detail later in this chapter.

Turning to Anglo-Saxon England, as we have seen, the concept of a solar hart most likely informs *Beowulf's* description of the stag-hall Heorot as a bright building that shone from a high position over many lands; additionally, it was to Heorot that the probably sun-like giant sword was brought. The golden deer on the Thames sword could also be a solar stag. Additionally, the notion of a sun-hart may inform the bronze model of the large-antlered, twelve-point, 'royal' red deer which stood on a metal ring above the stone 'sceptre' from the seventh-century ship-burial in Mound One at Sutton Hoo,⁶⁴ a beast which perhaps links the buried monarch either with Ing,⁶⁵ or with Woden/Óðinn, another deity with solar connections. The model's placement in a ship (conceptually on water?) and connection with a ring (the sun?) above a stone (the earth?) are suggestive of some of the Scandinavian solar stags described earlier.⁶⁶ Much later, an Anglo-Saxon instance of the fusion of sun and antlers appears on a fragment of a tenth- or eleventh-century cross-head from Winston on Tees, Durham, noted later in the present chapter. Other possible, but more obscure Anglo-Saxon evidence for the concept of the solar stag receives separate examination in Chapter 12.

The Hunt for the Sun

Beowulf's description of the strong-antlered hart being chased to a wood by hounds merits comparison to Norse and English myths and traditions about the pursuit, sometimes to a wood, of the sun by an (implicitly giant) wolf or wolves, or a wolfish creature, or a man and his dog.⁶⁷ This section demonstrates the widespread nature of this basic mythic theme, which increases the chance that it may inform *Beowulf*. In one of the theme's manifestations, as carvings on the Gosforth Cross,

64 See M. J. Enright, *The Sutton Hoo Sceptre and the Roots of Celtic Kingship Theory* (Dublin, 2006), 49–50, 173, 208.

65 Mortimer and Pollington, *Remaking*, 116.

66 We shall later examine another stanza from *Sólarljóð* (78) which describes a probably solar antler similarly concealed within a burial-mound, the earth of which is implicitly that of the *jarðar skip* 'ship of the earth' (77).

67 As, perhaps, on the second Gallehus horn (see above). Generally, on many of these myths, see A. Olrik, *Om Ragnarok* (Copenhagen, 1902), 189–95.

the sun is probably symbolized by an antlered stag chased by a wolf against the likely background of the world-tree.

The ‘Battle-Thief/Wolf of the Sky-Shield’

The earliest datable reference to such a myth in Old Norse texts comes in the *c.* 1000 *Þórsdrápa* ‘Þórr’s Poem’ by Eilífr Goðrúnarson. Its fifth stanza records that Þórr and his companions went walking to the *gunnvargs himintorgu fríðrar vers*. This complex kenning has sparked much discussion, but has recently been interpreted as ‘sea of the battle-wolf of the splendid sky-shield’, the sky-shield being the sun and the battle-wolf being the monstrous sun-devouring Fenrir, whose ‘sea’ is the mountains. If this is correct, the kenning alludes to the myth of Fenrir devouring the sun (evidenced more clearly below).⁶⁸

Alternatively, the *gunnvargr* ‘battle-wolf/thief’ might be a more usual mountain-dweller, a giant. We may compare, for example, a certain mountain-giant’s desire for the sun and the moon as payment, if he were to complete a fortification for the gods in a single winter, according to a tale told in *Gylfaginning*.⁶⁹ Perhaps, though, we should envisage more precisely a lupine giant akin to those noted elsewhere in this study, such as the mere-giants of *Beowulf* and the wolf-giant of the Sigtuna amulet. Fenrir was certainly a giant wolf, and his name appears in a list of poetic terms for *jötnar* ‘(devouring) giants’.⁷⁰

Skøll and Hati

According to *Grímnismál*, the sun seeks the shelter of a wood when hunted by two wolves:

‘Skøll heitir úlfr er fylgir inu skírleita goði
til varna viðar;⁷¹
en annarr Hati, hann er Hróðvitnis sonr,
sá skal fyr heiða brúði himins.’ (39)

68 See *PTP*, 85.

69 *SnEGylf*, 34–6; discussed in J. Harris, ‘The Masterbuilder Tale in Snorri’s *Edda* and Two Sagas’, *ANF* 91 (1976), 66–101 (reward of sun and moon at 95–6).

70 *PTP*, 722–3.

71 With *varna viðar*, perhaps compare *Járnviði* in *Völuspá* 40 (below).

'The wolf is called *Sköll* 'Mockery' who follows the pure/shiny-faced god [i.e., the sun]⁷² to the shelter of the wood; and the other, *Hati* 'Hater'—he is *Hróðvitrnir*'s 'Notorious Watcher's/Wolf's' [i.e., Fenrir's] son—he must be in front of the shining bride of the sky [i.e., the sun].'

As we shall see, this stanza's 'shining bride of the sky' was most likely also interpreted in medieval times as the moon, though probably less satisfactorily. Since wolves often hunt in pairs or packs and encircle their prey, it is most likely that *Sköll* (female) and *Hati* (male) work together here in an attempt to capture the same solar quarry, with *Sköll* driving the sun from behind, presumably with loud mockery, into the clutches of *Hati* in front. Although this shiny-faced god is not described as cervine, wolves, of course, hunt large animals, especially deer.

This exclusively solar interpretation of the stanza receives support from most manuscripts of *Gylfaginning*, such as the *Uppsala Edda* in which the authoritative character *Hár* 'High' explains why the sun (*sólin*) races fearfully across the sky: *Nær gengr sá er hana leiðir. Úlfar tveir gera þat, Skoll ok Hatti Hróðrvitnisson* 'Near (her) goes the one who leads ['loathes?'] her. Two wolves bring that about: *Skoll* and *Hatti Hróðrvitnisson*'.⁷³ One manuscript of *Heiðreks saga*, which calls the wolves *Skalli* and *Hatti*, also supports this interpretation by stating that *annarr þeira ferr fyrir, en annarr eptir sólu* 'one of them goes before, and the other after the sun', again without mentioning the moon.⁷⁴ The image of twin wolves before and behind presumably reflects the meteorological phenomenon of parhelion, which may appear on either side of the sun; it is popularly known as a 'sun-dog' or 'mock sun' in English, as a *solvoarg* 'sun-wolf' in Norwegian and as a *solulv* 'sun-wolf' in Swedish.⁷⁵

72 Note the association of *skír*- (also seen earlier in *Skírnir*) with the sun.

73 Heimir Pálsson (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: The Uppsala Edda DG 11 4to* (London, 2012), 22. Additionally, for references to *Skoll/Sköll* and *Hati* in a list of poetic terms for *vargr* 'wolf/thief/outlaw', see *PTP*, 902–5.

74 Tolkien, *Saga*, 81. *Skalli* is also a giant-name; see *PTP*, 713, 715.

75 Simek, *Dictionary*, 292. For the survival of this concept in nineteenth-century Icelandic folklore, see Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, I, 658–9; Gísli Sigurðsson, 'Snorri's Edda: The Sky Described in Mythological Terms', in Tangherlini, *Nordic Mythologies*, 193–5. The same phenomenon perhaps accounts for the *gúgjar sólar* 'giantess's suns' which *skinu grimmliga* 'shone grimly' in *Sólarljóð* 51, an image that I suspect scholars have misinterpreted (see Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*,

That the exclusively solar interpretation of *Grímnismál* 39 was not the only one is shown by two manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* in which Hár has—perhaps due to interpolation—Sköll pursuing and capturing the sun (a detail which implicitly equates her with an eclipsing dark moon), and Hati running ahead to take the moon:

‘Þat eru tveir úlfar, ok heitir sá er eptir henni ferr Sköll. Hann hræðisk hon ok hann mun taka hana, en sá heitir Hati Hróðvitnisson er fyrir henni hleypr, ok vill hann taka tunglit, ok svá mun verða.’⁷⁶

‘There are two wolves, and the one that goes after her [i.e., the sun] is called Sköll. She fears him and he will take her, but the one who runs before her is called Hati Hróðvitnisson, and he wants to take the moon, and that will come to pass.’

Subsequently, all manuscripts of *Gylfaginning* record that at Ragnarøk:

‘Þá verða þat er mikil tíðindi þykkja, at úlfrinn gleypir sólna, ok þykkir mǫnnum þat mikit mein. Þá tekr annarr úlfrinn tunglit, ok gerir sá ok mikit ógagn. Stjörnur nar hverfa af himninum.’⁷⁷

‘Then comes to pass that which will seem major news, that the wolf will swallow the sun, and that will seem to men a great injury. Then the other wolf will take the moon, and that will also work great disadvantage. The stars will vanish from the heavens.’

The wolves’ separate pursuit of sun and moon, though an acceptable variant tradition, may appear less compelling than their coordinated hunting of the sun in *Grímnismál* 39, assuming my interpretation of that stanza is correct. Snorri, and/or others, may (understandably) have misinterpreted *Grímnismál*, given that wolves and other canids are widely associated with the moon in world mythology⁷⁸—a connection

332). Cf. Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3*, II.i.25: ‘Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three suns?’

76 *SnEGylf*, 14 (with note on 60–1).

77 *SnEGylf*, 49.

78 Cashford, *Moon*, 113–4. For traditions about moon-eating dogs and other monsters, see E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 6th edn., 2 vols (London, 1920), I, 328–35; R. C. Carrier, ‘Cultural History of the Lunar and Solar Eclipse in the Early Roman Empire’, <http://richardcarrier.info/culturaleclipse.pdf>; MIFL, motif A737.1 ‘Eclipse caused by monster devouring sun or moon’. On the association of Hecate with moonless nights and barking dogs, see S. Karouzou, ‘An Underworld Scene on a Black-Figured Lekythos’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 92 (1972), 64–73 at 72–3.

that persists in the popular term ‘moon-dog’ for paraselene;⁷⁹ in particular, mythological canids often devour the moon.

The Old One, the Pitchforker and Mánagarmr

In my view, a passage from *Völuspá* records another myth of solar seizure by a wolfish creature, specifically a lupine troll. Stanzas 40 and 41 read:

‘Austr sat in aldna í Járnviði
ok fœddi þar Fenris kindir;
verðr af þeim öllum einna nokkurr
tungls tjúgari í trolls hami.

‘Fylliz fjörvi feigra manna,
rýðr ragna sjöt rauðum dreyra;
svört var ða [v.l. verða] sólskin of sumur eptir,
veðr öll válynd. Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?’

‘East in *Járnviðr* ‘Iron-Wood’ sat the old one⁸⁰ and there gave birth to [or ‘fed/reared’] Fenrir’s brood [WOLVES]; from among all those a notable one of (them) all will become the moon’s pitchforker in troll’s shape.

‘He fills [or ‘will fill’] himself with the flesh of doomed [i.e., dying/dead] men, reddens [or ‘will redden’] the gods’ dwellings with red blood; dark was [v.l. ‘becomes’ or ‘will become’] the sunshine then in following summers, all weather treacherous. Would you know more, or what?’

The key phrase here is *tungls tjúgari*, which admits more than one interpretation, and may have given rise to such. This phrase’s second

79 ‘Moon Dog’, in *Wikipedia* (30 January 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moon_dog. Cf. *EDD* s.v. *moon* 1 (9): ‘At Whitby, . . . when the moon is surrounded by a halo of watery clouds, the seamen say there will be a change of weather, for the “moon-dogs” are about’; *OED* s.v. ‘moon’ 16, however, records ‘moon-dog’ only in the senses ‘watchdog’ and ‘dog that bays the moon’. The phenomenon of paraselene might explain how it was that, on Maunday Thursday 1106, *wæron gesewen twegen monan on þære heofonan toforan þam dæge oðer be eastan, ond se oðer be westan begen fulle* ‘two moons were seen in the sky before day, one to the east and the other to the west, both full’; C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892–9), I, 240. Another text indicates that a dream of such a sight signifies joy and happiness; Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, 118–9.

80 A female, whom *Gylfaginning* identifies as a *gýgr* ‘giantess’ (see below).

word, *tjúgari*, is a hapax legomenon interpretable as an agent noun meaning ‘drawer (down)’ (ON *tjúga* ‘to draw’), perhaps by extension ‘destroyer’—but I propose more specifically ‘pitchforker’, from *tjúga* ‘pitchfork’.⁸¹ The phrase’s first word is the genitive singular of *tungl*, a noun which could potentially denote the sun or another heavenly body (plural *himintungl* means ‘heavenly bodies’), but which in the singular generally denotes the moon, as in preceding quotations. Due to the ambiguity of *tungl*, scholarly opinion is divided about the prey of the *tungls tjúgari*. Some commentators believe the monster seizes or destroys the moon,⁸² others the sun.⁸³

Without seeking to impoverish through disambiguation an image possibly designed to suggest more than one thing, I suggest that prior interpretations obscure the chief point. Strongly encouraged by the presence in medieval tradition of the fork-wielding, dog-owning Man in the Moon (whom we meet later in this chapter),⁸⁴ as well as the likely presence of other fork-wielding lunar beings in medieval Norse stories (discussed in Chapter 14), I interpret *tungls tjúgari* principally as ‘the moon’s pitchforker’. And by this I mean not a creature which takes the moon on a fork or otherwise draws it to destruction, but one which *belongs to* the moon and acquires something *for* the moon on a fork.⁸⁵ Otherwise, if I am wrong, the Man in the Moon’s use of a fork to gather twigs (explained below) is a remarkable red herring.⁸⁶

81 For this simplex, see CV. The noun also appears in the compound *heyttjúga* ‘hayfork’ (see Chapter 14) and in the name of a Dane who briefly ruled England in 1014, Sveinn *Tjúguskegg* ‘Forkbeard’. The notion of a celestial pitchforker may have been inspired by the sight of a crescent moon’s twin ‘horns’, and perhaps encouraged by the appearance of forked lightning and of comets with forked tails; cf. *DOE* s.v. *fyrclian*.

82 E.g., Hermann Pálsson (ed.), *Völuspá: The Sibyl’s Prophecy* (Edinburgh, 1996), 80 (though his glossary defines *tungl* as ‘a heavenly body; the sun’); Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 16–7, 142–3, who translates ‘moon-snatcher’; Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas* (Reykjavík, 2013), 97–8, who sees a ‘moon-chewing wolf’.

83 E.g., Sigurður Nordal (ed.), *Völuspá* (Durham, 1978, corr. rpt. 1982), 80; *SnEGylf*, 61, 149; Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, 15.

84 *MIFL*, motif A751 ‘Man in the moon’.

85 Cf. ON *fengari*, a term for the moon in *SnESkald*, I, 85, interpretable as either ‘shiner’ (< Greek φεγγάρι) or, I suggest, ‘seizer’ (cf. *fengr* ‘haul’, ‘booty’, *fanga* ‘to fetch, capture’); *PTP*, 912, 914. The homonymy of *fen-* and *fen* ‘fen’ may be noteworthy, given Grendel’s marshy environs and the moon’s captivity in fenland in the English folk-tale *The Dead Moon* (see Chapter 14).

86 Note, too, the forked tongue of the sun-devouring wolf-snake on the east face of the Gosforth Cross (discussed below).

A mythical pitchfork might serve as a brutal weapon, which would tie in with the lupine troll's bloody predation upon men in the gods' dwellings. But its primary purpose would presumably be to transport hay, straw or sheaves. Accordingly, I suggest that the moon's pitchforker in *Völuspá* not only preys on men but also uses its fork to draw away the sun's radiance, its *beams*, which we shall find imagined elsewhere in Old Norse poetry as runic 'staves', on behalf of its parent, the moon. This would explain why the sunshine—what remains of it—darkens in following summers, the sun having been severely weakened but not yet destroyed.

Interpreted in this way, stanzas 40 and 41 of *Völuspá* refer to a wolfish lunar troll.⁸⁷ If, as seems likely, a solar eclipse is implicit, they refer specifically to a wolfish troll of the dark (new) moon.⁸⁸ These two stanzas are then seen to continue the likely dark-moon theme of the preceding three stanzas in the *Codex Regius* text.⁸⁹ These successively treat:

- (a) A dwarven hall on *Niðavellir*, a name principally meaning 'Waning/Dark Moons' Plains' or 'Plains of *Niði* ['Waning/Dark Moon', a dwarf]' (37).⁹⁰
- (b) A venomous hall *sólu fjarri* 'far from the sun' (38), where ...
- (c) *Morðvargar* 'murderous thieves/criminals/wolves' wade through heavy streams and *sauð Niðhoggr nái framgengna, / sleit vargr vera* '*Niðhoggr* 'Waning/Dark-Moon Striker'⁹¹ sucked the corpses of the deceased, a/the thief/criminal/wolf tore men' (39).⁹²

87 For a discussion of the earliest references to trolls, including this one, see J. Lindow, *Trolls: An Unnatural History* (London, 2014), 14–29.

88 Secondly, the reference to blood may evoke a 'blood moon' during a lunar eclipse. In reality, the sight of 'dark sunshine' may be due to atmospheric ash after a volcanic eruption; see Sigurður Nordal, *Völuspá*, 81–2.

89 Though not in the variant version of *Völuspá* in *Hauksbók*. These two versions of the poem, together with a third quoted by Snorri in his *Prose Edda*, appear to differ mainly as a result of oral composition, rather than scribal variation. Quotations from *Völuspá* are from the *Codex Regius* text, unless otherwise stated.

90 A secondary meaning may be 'Kinsmen's Plains'.

91 Or (secondarily in my view) *Niðhoggr* 'Hostile Striker', the interpretation adopted by many editors. *Niðhoggr*/*Niðhoggr* is also the name of a dwarf, one that appears immediately after *Niði* in a verse list of dwarf-names; *PTP*, 695. It is also a name for a sword; *ibid.*, 807–8; *SnESkald*, I, 120.

92 Whether the snake *Niðhoggr* and the *vargr* are one and the same is unclear. They might be, as assumed by Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (ed.), *Eddukvæði*,

Additionally, in the poem's final stanza (66), Niðhoggr, identified as *inn dimmi dreki* 'the dim/dark dragon' and a *naðr* 'snake', arises *neðan frá Niðafjöllum* 'from below, from Dark Moons'/Niði's Mountains'.

I defer further analysis of 'the old one' and her pitchforker until Chapter 14. Here it remains to examine Hár's commentary on these stanzas in *Gylfaginning*. Immediately after the passage concerning Sköll and Hati Hróðvitnisson, he explains their origin:

'Gýgr ein býr fyrir austan Miðgarð í þeim skógi er Járnvíðr heitir. Í þeim skógi byggja þær tröllkonur er Járnvíðjur heita. In gamla gýgr fœðir at sonum marga jötna ok alla í vargs líkjum, ok þaðan af eru komnir þessir úlfar. Ok svá er sagt at af ættinni verðr sá einn mátkastr er kallaðr er Mánagarmr. Hann fyllisk með fjörvi allra fleira manna er deyja, ok hann gleypir tungl ok stökkvir blóði himin ok lopt ǫll. Þaðan týnir sól skini sínu ok vindar eru þá ókyrrir ok gnýja heðan ok handan.'⁹³

'A giantess lives east of Miðgarðr in the forest which is called Járnvíðr.⁹⁴ In that forest there dwell the troll-women who are called Járnvíðjur. The old giantess breeds as sons many giants and all in the likeness of a wolf/thief/outlaw [*vargs*],⁹⁵ and these wolves are descended from there. And it is said that from that family will come one, the mightiest, who is called Mánagarmr. He will fill himself with the flesh of all men who die, and he will swallow the *tungl* and bespatter with blood all the sky and air. From that the sun will lose its shine and winds will then be unquiet and will roar to and fro.'

Here Snorri clearly paraphrases *Völuspá* 40–1, but without reusing the word *tjúgari*. The *tungls tjúgari* becomes the otherwise unattested Mánagarmr, who appears distinct from Sköll and Hati. If Sköll and Hati together hunt only the sun, we may identify Mánagarmr's prey,

ÍF, 2 vols (Reykjavík, 2014), I, 301 (note also my discussion below of a composite wolf-snake on the Gosforth Cross). Alternatively, the *vargr* might be the moon's man-eating pitchforker of stanza 40, whom, we shall shortly see, Snorri describes as having the likeness of a *vargr*.

93 *SnEGylf*, 14.

94 She is possibly the *Angrboða* 'Grief-Announcer' of *SnEGylf*, 27. This name's resemblance to *Aurboða*, mother of Gerðr, might be noteworthy.

95 Cf. the Romanian *vârcolaci* 'wolf-hairy ones' and related Slavic and Greek monsters, who include werewolfish terrors with vampyric and sometimes nightmarish associations. In Romanian tradition the *vârcolaci* seize and devour the sun and the moon; see Cashford, *Moon*, 326–7; 'Vârcolac', in *Wikipedia* (10 July 2019), <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A2rcolac>; 'Vrykolakas', in *Wikipedia* (30 September 2019), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vrykolakas>

the *tungl*, as either ‘the moon’ or ‘heavenly bodies’. Alternatively, if Sköll captures the sun and Hati the moon, then Mánagarmr’s prey is presumably unspecified ‘heavenly bodies’,⁹⁶ unless we admit the presence of a glaring inconsistency in *Gylfaginning*. Assuming Mánagarmr is not Snorri’s invention, it would not be surprising if there had been traditions about him devouring the moon or heavenly bodies in general. But his name admits the possibility that his prey (like Hati’s) was originally the sun in particular, and that he, like (in my view) the *tungls tjúgari*, took sunshine on behalf of his owner or parent, namely the moon—on whom, however, he might later have turned. For *Mána-garmr* means either ‘Moon’s/Máni’s Garmr’ or ‘Mána-Garmr’. *Máni*, as well as being the common masculine noun for ‘moon’ (genitive *mána*), is the name of a male lunar personification mentioned shortly earlier in *Gylfaginning* in an episode, possibly indebted to traditions about the Man in the Moon, describing how Máni took two children from the Earth;⁹⁷ *Mána* ‘Moon’ is the name of a lunar troll-woman or giantess whom we met earlier and shall re-encounter.⁹⁸ Mánagarmr might be so-called, therefore, not (or not so much) because he was notorious for devouring the moon, but because he *belonged to* the moon. In this regard, it may be significant that the second element in *Mána-garmr* presumably references *Garmr* ‘Baying One’, an apocalyptic canine in *Völuspá* whose final baying in stanza 58 comes soon after *sol tér sortna* ‘the sun turns black’ and the stars disappear from the sky. If, as is very often supposed, Garmr is in origin a double of Fenrir, we may note that the latter will explicitly destroy the sun (not the moon), according to *Vafþrúðnismál* 46–7, in a likely image of a solar eclipse that implicitly identifies Fenrir with the dark moon:⁹⁹

96 As translated in Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, 15.

97 *SnEGylf*, 14. For an earlier personification of the moon as Máni, see North, *Haustlong*, 8–9, 63. *Máni* was also the name of a medieval Icelandic poet (also jokingly called *Tungli*) who asked for a favourable wind for sailing from the *þungstalls konungr sólar* ‘king of the sun’s heavy/load-stool [HEAVEN]’; *Mána þáttur skálds* (October 1998), <https://www.snerpa.is/net/isl/th-mana.htm>

98 See Chapters 3 and 14.

99 Cf. the Greek hellhound Cerberus, whose link with the dark-moon goddess Hecate I note below. Also note the baying hellhound which confronts Óðinn in the Eddic poem *Baldrs Draumar* ‘Baldr’s Dreams’ (2–3), though it has no clear lunar significance.

Óðinn kvað:

‘Fjölð ek fór, fjölð ek freistaðak,
fjölð ek reynda regin:
hvaðan kœmr sól á inn slétta himin,
þá er þessa hefir Fenrir farit?’

Vafþrúðnir kvað:

‘Eina dóttur berr Álfroðull,
áðr hana Fenrir fari;
sú skal ríða, þá er regin deyja,
móður brautir mær.’

Óðinn said:

‘Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers;
how will the sun come (back) to the smooth sky, once Fenrir has destroyed
[or ‘overtaken’]¹⁰⁰ it?’

Vafþrúðnir said:

‘Álfroðull ‘Elf-Halo’ [i.e., the sun] will bear one daughter before Fenrir
destroys [or ‘overtakes’] her; that girl must ride, when the powers die, the
paths of her mother.’¹⁰¹

Albeit removed from these Norse sources in space and time, an Iron Age Gaulish coin supplies vivid support for the concept of a monstrous canid attacking the sun, quite likely on behalf of the moon. It depicts an open-mouthed wolf or dog apparently about to devour the sun (a circle containing a cross) from the right, while on the left a crescent moon attacks, or waits for, the sun; alternatively, the wolf may be regurgitating the sun for the incomplete moon.¹⁰² Either way, it appears likely from this coin, possibly together with others from Britain which may show

100 See T. W. Machan (ed.), *Vafþrúðnismál*, 2nd edn. (Durham, 2008), 101. The ambiguity is satisfying: the implicitly lunar Fenrir ‘destroys’ the sun when his silhouette ‘overtakes’ it during a solar eclipse.

101 Cf. a Sámi myth highlighted in Dubois, ‘Mythic Sun’, 208. Whether, in the Norse myth, the sun’s daughter ‘rides’ on a steed or in a vehicle is unknown.

102 The beast appears to me less likely to be about to devour both sun and moon, although I do not wholly discount this possibility. See P.-M. Duval, *Monnaies Gauloises et mythes celtiques* (Paris, 1987), 22–5; M. Aldhouse-Green, *An Archaeology of Images: Iconology and Cosmology in Iron Age and Roman Europe* (London, 2004), 124–5, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203647455>; D. N. Briggs, ‘Reading the Images on Iron Age Coins: 3. Some Cosmic Wolves’, *Chris Rudd List* 110 (2010), 2–4 at 2.

a sun-devouring wolf of the Norfolk fens (compare *Fenrir*),¹⁰³ that the concept of a canid attacking the sun on behalf of, or as, the moon existed in parts of Iron Age northern Europe.

Wolf-Snake versus Sun-Stag: Norse Myth on the Gosforth Cross

Having so far failed to adduce an explicit hunt for a solar *hart* in Old Norse mythology, in this section I aim to remedy that shortcoming by examining the carvings on a tall and slender tenth-century Anglo-Norse cross of red sandstone which stands in the grounds of St. Mary's Church in Gosforth, Cumbria. These carvings are rather worn, which makes it hard to discern some details. However, after studying three-dimensional photographic models of the monument by Dominic Powlesland,¹⁰⁴ together with drawings by the English antiquary W. G. Collingwood (1854–1932) which I reproduce in Figure 4,¹⁰⁵ they seem to me likely to include perhaps the earliest surviving representation of this form of the

103 Briggs, 'Reading the Images ... 3'; D. N. Briggs, 'The Language of Inscriptions on Icenian Coinage', in J. A. Davies (ed.), *The Iron Age in Northern East Anglia: New Work in the Land of the Iceni* (Oxford, 2011), 83–102 at 98; the sun's coffee-bean shape on some of these coins probably reflects its conception as an eye, which opens at dawn and closes at sunset; cf. West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 198–9. In addition, for parallels between an Icenian god, associated iconographically with grain, boar and horse, and Freyr, see D. N. Briggs, 'Sacred Image and Regional Identity in Late-Prehistoric Norfolk', in T. A. Heslop, E. Mellings and M. Thøfner (ed.), *Art, Faith and Place in East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2013), 30–49 at 40–1. For a possible Anglo-Saxon depiction of Fenrir, or a related wolf, pursuing a ship (of the sun or the dead?) on a late sixth- or seventh-century Anglo-Saxon funeral urn from Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk, see T. Pestell, 'Paganism in Early-Anglo-Saxon East Anglia', in *ibid.*, 66–87 at 76–7.

104 See D. Powlesland, 'Gosforth Cross Colour Annotated' (March 23 2016), <https://sketchfab.com/models/3d7f7b702a584d54a6a8c016a5b750a9>; and R. Land, 'Gosforth Cross Project: Teachers Resources' (6 June 2016), <http://gosforthcrossproject.blogspot.com/2016>. Additionally, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a nineteenth-century plaster copy of this cross.

105 See W. G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London, 1927, rpt. Felinfach, 1989), 156 fig. 184. Also valuable for illustrations and commentary are R. N. Bailey and R. Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture. Volume II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* (Oxford, 1988), II, 100–4 and illustrations 288–308; K. Berg, 'The Gosforth Cross', *JWCI* 21 (1958), 27–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/750485>; Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 125–31; E. L. Ridsen, 'The Gosforth Cross Narrative and *Beowulf*', *Enarratio: Publications of the Medieval Association of the Midwest* 3 (1995), 1–14, <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/71220>; Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*.

sun-destroying myth. They merit investigation in detail not just for their intrinsic interest, but also because, as far as I know, the presence therein of a solar hart has been overlooked by scholars, who might also have misinterpreted other details.



Figure 4. The Gosforth Cross as Drawn by W. G. Collingwood.
Order of faces from left to right: south, west, north, east.

Source: W. G. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (London, 1927, rpt. Felinfach, 1989), 156, fig. 184. Image courtesy of Archaeology in Europe.

On all four faces of this monument, immediately below the wheel-cross at the top, we find differing representations of a huge monster (or

monsters) with the head or heads of a wolf (or other canid), and a long, thin, limbless and intertwined or interlinked body suggestive of a snake. On at least three of the faces I take these representations to denote the same wolf-headed snake in different states at different times during, or connected with, Ragnarøk. The wolf-snake strongly suggests a fusion of two or more apocalyptic monsters known from Old Norse mythological texts: on the one hand, a wolf or wolves, either Fenrir/Fenrisúlfr (and/or perhaps Garmr), or Sköll and Hati; and on the other hand, *Miðgarðsormr* ‘Miðgarðr’s Snake’, Fenrir’s world-encircling sibling.¹⁰⁶ Their union on the Gosforth Cross might have been encouraged by limitations of space in which to carve. I rather believe, however, that the conflation has a genuine mythological basis, as we shall find that the Gosforth Cross is not the only Norse source to suggest a fusion of apocalyptic wolf and snake, and other mythological traditions—some very old—evince similar monsters.¹⁰⁷ An ancient Babylonian astrological tablet, for example, shows a lion-headed serpent within the moon, with which it might be identified, or with which it might be linked as an eclipse-monster, given that a divine hero armed with a sickle-shaped weapon is shown grappling with it.¹⁰⁸ More famously, the Greek hellhound Cerberus had multiple heads and snake appendages, including a snake-headed tail.¹⁰⁹

106 For other pictorial representations of these and some other characters shown on the Gosforth Cross, see Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*.

107 Additionally, Brown, ‘Firedrake’, 439 observes that serpents in medieval illustrations often look ‘a good deal like a dog’.

108 See P.-A. Beaulieu, ‘The Babylonian Man in the Moon’, *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 51 (1999), 91–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1359732>. Beaulieu shows that the Babylonian moon-dragon was fifty or sixty leagues long; compare the climactic dragon of *Beowulf*, which was *fiftiges fotgearnearces lang* ‘fifty foot-marks long’ (3042–3), and which may well also have a lunar aspect (see Chapter 14). With the Babylonian imagery, compare also that within a representation of the sun on a Viking Age sword-pommel from Bedale, North Yorkshire (see Chapter 16). On the ancient significance of the dragon, including specifically the uroboros and the dragon’s head and tail, in relation to eclipses, see also G. Azarpay and A. D. Kilmer, ‘The Eclipse Dragon on an Arabic Frontispiece-Miniature, with a Note on the Babylonian Mythological Explanation of the Lunar Eclipse’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 98 (1978), 363–74, <https://doi.org/10.2307/599748>

109 See T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, 2 vols (Baltimore, 1996), I, 22–3; D. G. Gershenson, *Apollo the Wolf-God* (Washington, 1991), 93–4. Grendel and his wolfish mother are not described as snake-like, but they are associated with the Devil, the most notorious medieval serpent, and their mere is home to *wyrmycynnes fela*, / *sellice sædracan* ‘many of snake-kind, strange

On the south, west and east faces of the Gosforth Cross the wolf-snake gapes upwards at a wheeled cross, which, with its central eye-like protrusion amid four ray-like arms, very probably symbolizes the sun.¹¹⁰ It appears, therefore, that the wolf-snake is about to devour the sun. In other words, the wolf-snake probably represents the dark/new moon on the point of obscuring the sun during a solar eclipse—we may compare, albeit distantly, the crescent moon's possible representation by the Babylonian lion-serpent, and Cerberus' likely association with Hecate, goddess of the dark moon.¹¹¹

We saw earlier that Sköll and Hati hunt the sun in *Grímnismál* and that *Vafþrúðnismál* records how Fenrir will destroy the sun. What seems to have gone unnoticed by scholars is that Miðgarðsormr may also be associated with the dark moon and therefore with the 'devouring' of the sun during a solar eclipse. I base this claim on a partly new interpretation of *Völuspá* 56–7 (*Codex Regius* text), two stanzas which describe Þórr's encounter with this monster and the darkening of the sun at Ragnarök:

‘Pá kœmr inn mæri mögr Hlóðynjar,
 gengr Óðins sonr við úlf vega;
 drepr hann af móði Miðgarðs véur;
 munu halir allir heimstøð ryðja;
 gengr fet níu Fjörgynjar burr,
 neppr, frá naðri niðs ókvíðnum.

‘Sól tér sortna, sígr fold í mar,
 hverfa af himni heiðar stjörnur;
 geisar eimi við aldnara,
 leikr hár hiti við himin sjálfan.’¹¹²

sea-dragons' (*Beowulf* 1425–6). For another potential link between Grendel's mother and a serpent, the Biblical Leviathan, see Chapter 15. In addition, recall the serpentine devourer on the Repton Stone mentioned in Chapter 1.

110 Similarly Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 35. Alternatively, perhaps we have the sun on the east face and the moon on the west (or vice versa). For an identification of the monsters at the top of the south and west sides as Sköll and Hati attacking the sun and moon, see *ibid.*, 28.

111 For this, see Karouzou, 'Underworld Scene'.

112 The wording of the *Hauksbók* version of the poem differs significantly. Parts of that text are illegible, but it seems that Óðinn fights a wolf and Þórr fights a snake.

'Then comes the glorious child of Hlóðyn, Óðinn's son [PÓRR] goes to fight against the wolf; it strikes Miðgarðr's guardian [PÓRR] in anger; all men will abandon the homestead; Fjörgyn's son [PÓRR] goes nine steps, expiring, from the snake (that is/was) unapprehensive of the dark moon.

'Sun turns black, earth sinks into sea, bright stars vanish from the sky; ember-smoke rages against the life-nourisher [FIRE or THE WORLD-TREE], high flame plays against the sky itself.'

The first of these stanzas contains two main difficulties of interpretation, at least as perceived by scholars: *úlf* 'wolf' and *niðs ókviðnum*.

The reference to the *úlf* is unexpected, as Víðarr, Óðinn's son, has only just killed a carrion-beast, presumably Fenrir, in stanza 55. In stanza 56 *úlf* could easily be a scribal error for the expected *orm* 'snake', prompted by the similar second line of stanza 53 *er Óðinn ferr við úlf vega* 'when Óðinn goes to fight against the wolf', and perhaps by other traditions.¹¹³ But whatever the original reading of stanza 56, it is striking that, as things stand, it ostensibly refers to a wolf that is also a snake—a composite wolf-snake, which is just what we see on the Gosforth Cross.¹¹⁴

As for *niðs ókviðnum*, some commentators view *ókviðnum* 'unapprehensive' (dative singular, referring to the snake) as a corruption of *ókviðinn* (nominative singular, referring to Þórr).¹¹⁵ And all the editions I have consulted interpret the first word as *niðs* (not *niðs*), the genitive singular of *nið* 'malice', 'slander', 'reproach', 'vile act', although the quantity of its vowel cannot be determined from the metre. In my view, however, no corruption need be assumed, and the first word should be interpreted principally as the genitive singular of a neuter noun *nið* 'waning/dark moon'.¹¹⁶ Some dictionaries of Old Norse record *nið* solely

113 *Lokasenna* 58 raises the prospect of a fight between Þórr and the wolf, though implicitly questions whether it will come to pass. Loki taunts Þórr with the words 'En þú þorir þú ekki, er þú skalt við úlfinn vega, / ok svelgr hann allan Sigföður!' 'But you won't be daring then, when you shall/should fight against the wolf, and he [the wolf] swallows Sigfaðir 'Victory-Father' [Óðinn] whole!'

114 A close kinship between snake and wolf in Old Norse myth is also apparent from the siblings Fenrir and Miðgarðsormr, and from *Grimnismál* 34, which records that various snakes that lie under Yggdrasill are sons of *Grafoitnir* 'Grave/Digging-Wolf'.

115 See Sigurður Nordal, *Völuspá*, 108–9; Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, *Eddukvæði*, I, 305.

116 Both *niðs* and *niðs* are metrically acceptable, and the ambiguity may be deliberate; see also my discussion in Chapter 14 of potentially ambiguous instances of OE *nið* in *Beowulf*. Also note another potential use of ON *nið* 'dark moon' in the unique compound *niðfölr* in the *Hauksbók* text of *Völuspá* 50:

as a feminine noun (which would have genitive singular **niðar*),¹¹⁷ but the situation is potentially more complicated, as modern Icelandic attests a neuter noun *nið* in this sense, which I think is anticipated here.¹¹⁸ If *niðs* is interpreted in this way, the immediate sense becomes clear, and we may

‘Hrymr ekr austan, hefiz lind fyrir,
snýz Jormungandr í jötunmóði,
ormr knýr unnir, en ari hlakkar,
slítr nái niðfölr. Naglfar losnar.’

‘Hrymr [a giant] drives from the east, raises his shield before him, *Jormungandr* “Enormous Staff” [Miðgarðsormr] writhes in giant-rage, the snake lashes waves, and an eagle shrieks, one pale as/in the waning moon(?) tears corpses. Naglfar [a ship] breaks loose.’

Whether the word is *niðfölr* ‘pale as the waning moon’ or ‘rust-pale’ (cf. Gothic *nidwa* ‘rust’) or *niðfölr* ‘derision-pale’ is uncertain. So is whether it describes the preceding eagle or another creature (Niðhoggr?). The *Codex Regius* text has a different word, *neffölr* ‘nose-pale’, which might describe the preceding eagle, as some eagles have beaks lighter than their plumage. *Gylfaginning*’s quotation of this stanza has either *niðfölr* or *niðfölr*. For differing opinions, see H. Falk, ‘Oldnorske ordforklaringer’, *ANF* 5 (1889), 111–24 at 111; Sigurður Nordal, *Völuspá*, 97–8; *SnEGylf*, 127; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 146; Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, *Eddukvæði*, I, 303.

- 117 See s.v. *nið* in *CV* and *ONP*. The word also appears in compounds, such as *niðmyrkr*, *niðamyrkr* ‘pitch-darkness’ and most likely *Niðhoggr* ‘Dark-Moon Striker’, where its gender cannot be determined. Relatives include Danish *næ* in the phrase *i ny og næ* ‘now and then’, and Swedish *nedan* in *månen är i nedan* ‘the moon is on the wane’ (compare *nedan* ‘(down) below’). For discussions of this word, see A. M. Sturtevant, ‘Irregularities in the Old Norse Substantive Declensions’, *SS* 19 (1946), 79–88 at 85–6; K. G. Ljunggren, ‘Isl. *nið*, nysv. *nedan* (månfasen) och deras närmaste släktingar’, *ANF* 67 (1952), 54–69.
- 118 See Árni Böðvarsson, *Íslensk orðabók*, 2nd edn. (Reykjavík, 1993), s.v. 1 *nið*, -s, which gives three meanings: ‘waning moon (not seen except as a thin sliver),’ ‘darkness’ and ‘dark snowfall’ (my translations). *LP* records both neuter *nið* and feminine plural *niðar* in medieval Norse poetry; La Farge and J. Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda: Based on Hans Kuhn’s Kurzes Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg, 1992) also records neuter *nið* ‘waning moon’ (queried as a plural form), though not here, as well as feminine plural *niðar* ‘waning moon; phases of the moon’. According to Sturtevant, ‘Irregularities’, 85–6: ‘The substantive *nið* appears in the plur. as a neuter *ja*-stem, often without the regular *j*-suffix (cf. *nið*, *nið[j]la*, *nið[j]lum*, *nið*), to denote the phases of the waning moon. But occasionally there occur also the plur. forms of a fem. *ō*-stem (*nið-ar*, -a, -um, -ar) in the same sense The fem. plur. forms of the substantive could all the more easily supplant the neut. forms in that the two declensions converged in the gen. and dat. cases (*nið-a*, *nið-um*); hence *nið-ar*, nom.-acc, for *nið*, nom.-acc.’ Ljunggren, ‘Isl. *nið*’, identifies other related neuters in Swedish, Danish and Norwegian, but concludes that the neuter is secondary to the feminine, perhaps having developed under the influence of neuter ON *ný* ‘new (i.e., waxing/full) moon’. Either way, the presence of a neuter genitive singular *niðs* in *Völuspá*, which neither scholar discusses, would be explicable. See also *ANEW* s.v. *nið* 1; *ÍO* s.v. *nið* 1.

also attribute it broader contextual suitability. Thus, we have a reference to a snake that was ‘unapprehensive of the dark moon’ (as presumably was the dragon Niðhoggr from Niðafjöll in the same poem). This reference to the moon’s darkness then leads on naturally to a description of the sun turning black, presumably when eclipsed by the dark moon, and to the vanishing of the stars. By including the moon, this interpretation also has the potential virtue of describing *all* the heavenly lights as vanishing in darkness, not just the sun and the stars. If this reading is accepted, we may deem fairly straightforward a passage that one respected scholar called ‘the most difficult line in the poem’.¹¹⁹ At the same time, we may find the conflation of sun-devouring wolf and world-serpent on the Gosforth Cross more understandable and significant.

Further evidence that, for one reason or another, medieval people associated a darkened moon with a snake—in the following case a fire-breathing one—comes from a passage in the *Chronica* ‘Chronicle’ of the English monk Gervase of Canterbury (died c. 1210).¹²⁰ He records that on Sunday 18 June 1178:

post solis occasum, luna prima, signum apparuit mirabile, quinque vel eo amplius viris ex adverso sedentibus. Nam nova luna lucida erat, novitatis suæ more cornua protendens ad orientem; et ecce subito superius comu in duo divisum est. Ex hujus divisionis medio prosilivit fax ardens, flammam, carbones et scintillas longius proiciens. Corpus interim lunæ quod inferius erat torquebatur quasi anxie, et, ut eorum verbis utar, qui hoc michi retulerunt et oculis viderunt propriis, ut percussus coluber luna palpitabat. Post hoc rediit in proprium statum. Hanc vicissitudinem duodecies et eo amplius repetiit, videlicet ut ignis tormenta varia sicut prælibatum est sustineret, iterumque in statum rediret priorem. Post has itaque vicissitudines, a cornu usque in cornu scilicet per longum seminigra facta est. Hæc michi qui hæc scribo retulerunt viri illi qui suis hoc viderunt

119 Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 151.

120 Generally on connections in world mythology between snakes and the moon, including the dark moon, see Cashford, *Moon*, 101–3, 156–9, 212–3, 307–9. Cashford also observes that ‘The time taken by the Moon to circle back to the same node is called the draconic month (from the Greek *drakon*, meaning ‘dragon’). In Europe, the Ascending Node of the Moon is still known as the “dragon’s head” and the Descending Node as the “dragon’s tail”, testimony to the ancient idea of eclipses brought about by celestial dragons’ (327). Hartner, *Goldhörner*, argues that the notion of the eclipse-dragon is key to the interpretation of the iconography on the Gallehus horns. See also W. Hartner, ‘The Vaso Vescovali in the British Museum: A Study on Islamic Astrological Iconography’, *Kunst des Orients* 9 (1973–4), 99–130.

oculis, fidem suam vel jusjurandum dare parati, quod in supradictis nichil addiderunt falsitatis.¹²¹

after sunset, when the moon had first become visible, a miraculous sign appeared to five or more men who were sitting facing it. For the new moon was clear, and as is customary in its new state, its horns were stretching to the east; and, behold, suddenly the upper horn divided in two! And from the middle of this division there sprang forth a burning torch, throwing out flame, glowing coals and sparks a long way. Meanwhile, the body of the moon which was below [i.e., the lower part of the moon] writhed as if anxiously, and, according to the words of those who reported this to me and who saw it with their own eyes, the moon throbbed like a snake that has been struck. After this it returned to its proper state. It repeated this change twelve times or more, so that the fire clearly sustained various torments, as it were freely, and then returned again to its former state. And so, after these changes, from horn to horn, manifestly along its length, it became semi-black. These things were related to me, the present writer, by those men who saw it with their own eyes, and who are prepared to stake their honour on oath that they have added no falsehood to what is said above.¹²²

Whatever the scientific explanation for this extraordinary sight,¹²³ we may observe that at Ragnarøk the Miðgarðsormr similarly writhes *snýz* ‘writhes’ in *Völuspá* 50, and blows out poison (there is no mention of fire) in *Gylfaginning*.¹²⁴

Interesting as this hopefully is, we still have yet to see a hunt for a solar stag. I come to it in the following reading of the whole iconographic programme of the Gosforth Cross, without which any interpretation of individual details may fail to convince for lack of a coherent context. The following reading, which has the basic solar eclipse myth at its heart, aims to explain the whole chiefly from the perspective of Germanic apocalyptic myth, although the programme’s climax appears principally Christian and some aspects remain obscure. I offer it tentatively, given the monument’s lack of accompanying inscriptions and the weathering

121 W. Stubbs (ed.), *The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury*, 2 vols (London, 1879–80), I, 276.

122 My translation, aided by that of R. Y. Hathorn in J. B. Hartung, ‘Was the Formation of a 20-km-Diameter Impact Crater on the Moon Observed on June 18, 1178?’, *Meteoritics* 11 (1976), 187–94 at 187–8.

123 See A. Saiber, ‘The Giordano Asteroid and the Giordano Bruno Lunar Crater: A Tale of Two Namings’, *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 10 (2004), 183–91 at 185–91.

124 *SnEGylf*, 50.

of centuries, which as well as damaging the carvings themselves has removed any paint that might once have made them stand out. My reading proceeds from the south face to the west, north and east faces in turn (left to right in Figure 4)—a propitious progression implicitly leading to the sun's return at dawn.¹²⁵

I read the carvings on the south face from the bottom up. Above what could well be a representation of the bark of the sacred Norse world-tree, which is present on all faces (though not mentioned again in this discussion) and which implicitly blends into the wood of the cosmological Christian Cross above,¹²⁶ we see a figure fettered in a coiled position. His identity is uncertain, but two Norse candidates spring to mind. One is Loki, whom the gods bound as punishment for his instigation of the slaying of Baldr. The other is the dead Baldr himself, shown bound in the confines of Hel, the Norse underworld, from which the gods failed to redeem him; a horizontal knot-pattern above him might denote the barrier between the worlds of the living and the dead. Since a substantially *dissimilar* fettered Loki appears, albeit in a corresponding position, on the west face, I favour identification with Baldr. In that case, the iconographic programme starts immediately with a stark depiction of the central tragedy of Norse mythology: the dead Baldr's captivity in Hel.

Above the horizontal knot-pattern (also suggestive of a snake) is a rider holding a downward-pointing spear. His spearhead points to the fettered 'Baldr'-figure below, implying a connection between them. The rider may therefore be Baldr's father, the spear-god Óðinn. He appears, however, to have one arm shorter than the other. This detail, if not illusory due to flexure of the arm, suggests the god Týr, whose hand was bitten off by the fettered Fenrir.¹²⁷ (Perhaps we may entertain

125 By contrast, the reading by W. S. Calverley, *Notes on the Early Sculptured Crosses, Shrines and Monuments in the Present Diocese of Carlisle*, ed. W. G. Collingwood (Kendal, 1899), 138–66 proceeds from west to south to east to north (see also the comment at 167).

126 On this topic, see further G. R. Murphy, *Tree of Salvation: Yggdrasil and the Cross in the North* (Oxford, 2013), with this point being made at 102. For the notion that the sun, represented on the Gosforth Cross by the surmounting wheeled cross, rested in the branches of a tree, see *MIFL*, motif 714.2 'Sun and moon placed in top of tree'; cf. the moon's position in the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale 'Der Mond' (summarized in Chapter 14).

127 See *SnEGylf*, 25. A scene carved on a Viking Age hogback stone from Sockburn on Tees has been interpreted as showing Týr with his hand in the mouth of a large fettered wolf—Fenrir; see Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 134–6.

a composite representation of both gods.) An identification with Týr would link with the image immediately above of a wolf apparently escaping from snake-like fetters.¹²⁸ This is doubtless Fenrir (or Garmr) escaping from his bonds at Ragnarøk, in contrast to the 'Baldr'-figure below. Above the wolf is an antlered stag, which the wolf is doubtless hunting. In my view, the wolf's quarry is a solar hart identifiable with the solar wheel-cross at the top of the monument.¹²⁹ Both are about to be devoured by Fenrir in a symbolic representation of the sun's destruction.

Immediately above the hart is another wolf-headed snake. This one is gaping, like the one above it, but either devouring, or gagged by, a ring-like feature.¹³⁰ The image might anticipate an annular solar eclipse, during which the new moon (the snake) and the sun (the ring-like feature) appear in syzygy, literally 'yoked together'.¹³¹ At the same time, since the ring-like feature passes between (or in front of?) the back of the monster's head and the upper part of its body, it might be interpretable as part of the monster's body, in which case the creature would be biting itself and effectively gagged by itself.¹³² This could be explained as an

128 For indications that this myth once had a place in solar mythology, see André, *Tracing*, 144, 148, 155–7, 187–9. The evidence includes a picture-stone from Austers, Hangvar, Gotland showing, above what is probably a huge solar wheel-cross, a large centipede-like monster into whose gaping mouth a man seems to place his hand; for this stone, see also S. Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, 2 vols (Stockholm, 1941–2), I, fig. 27, II, 69, figs. 403–4; E. Nylén and J. P. Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols: The Picture Stones of Gotland from the Viking Age and Before* (Stockholm, 1988), 31.

129 Previously the stag has been identified as 'the divine hart—the fountain of living waters'; as the hart Eikþyrnir, which stands on Óðinn's hall, according to *Grímnismál* 26 (though there is no hall on the Gosforth Cross); and vaguely as a representation of 'good, perhaps a symbol for one particular god, being attacked by the hound, representing evil'; see Calverley, *Notes*, 152–3; Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 29, 39–41. Note also the carving on the Gosforth 'fishing-stone' (mentioned in Chapter 5), which shows a deer, perhaps representing Christ, separated by a horizontal knot-pattern from a scene showing Þórr and the giant Hymir fishing for the Miðgarðsormr.

130 This feature might have been influenced by medieval Christian tradition, or at least might have been accommodated to it. The Christian theologian Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080–c. 1140) described Leviathan's jaw as having been pierced by the ring of Christ's love. The Icelandic *Hómiliúbók* 'Homily Book' also refers to a ring in a similar context, while *Nidrstignings saga* 'The Saga of the Descent (into Hell)' equates Satan with the world-encircling Miðgarðsormr trapped on God's fishing hook. See Marchand, 'Leviathan', 328–32.

131 See my interpretation of the north face below.

132 Another carving of an intimidating snake, gagged by means of a cord threading either its jaws or enormous fangs, appears on a tenth-century cross-shaft from

economical depiction of the world-encircling Miðgarðsormr biting its own tail, as described in *Gylfaginning*.¹³³

Directly above this monster's head, and immediately below the cross-head, is the free, coiled tail of an ungagged wolf-snake, which I interpret as the same monster as the one below it. Together, these images suggest a progression from the wolf-snake's constriction to its advance at Ragnarøk, when, according to Old Norse texts, the world falls to ruins and *both* the wolf (see below) and the snake gape horribly, like a return of the primordial gap ... *ginnunga* 'gap ... of yawnings(?)' (*Völuspá* 3). Of the snake's gaping *Völuspá* (*Hauksbók* text, stanza 55H) records: *Ginn lopt yfir lindi jarðar, / gapa ýgs kjaptar orms í hæðum* 'The earth's girdle [SNAKE] yawns across the sky, the jaws of the terrible snake gape in the heights'; that this snake has *kjaptar* 'jaws', like the apocalyptic *úlfr* 'wolf' of *Vafþrúðnismál* 53, might be another indication of wolf-snake fusion.¹³⁴ At any rate, it therefore appears that the south face may have two comparable scenes of apocalyptic release: of the wolf from its snake-like fetters and of the wolf-snake from its gag, both of which creatures are in pursuit of the sun.¹³⁵

I read the west face similarly from bottom to top. First, we see a scene easily identifiable from *Gylfaginning*.¹³⁶ A horizontal Loki lies bound beneath a snake.¹³⁷ Immediately above him his wife, Sigyn, kneels with a receptacle in which she catches poison that would otherwise drip from the viper's fangs into her husband's face. Possibly implicit is the moment when she leaves to empty the receptacle, when the venom falls

Middleton, East Yorkshire; see http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/catvol_search_results.php?id=801 (Middleton 02); Murphy, *Tree*, 114–8. Note also the possibly gagged snake on another cross from the same place (Middleton 01), mentioned below.

133 *SnEGylf*, 27: *bitr í sporð sér* 'it bites into its own tail'. For other representations of this idea in Germanic art, see G. Speake, *Anglo-Saxon Animal Art and its Germanic Background* (Oxford, 1980), 90–1.

134 Cf. Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 77; K. J. Wanner, 'Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws, and a Silent Áss (or Two): Doing Things with Mouths in Norse Myth', *JEGP* 111 (2012), 1–24 at 13. It seems noteworthy that where the *Codex Regius* text (56) refers to the wolf when we expect the snake, the *Hauksbók* text attributes the wolf's(?) jaws to the snake.

135 Cf. also the positions of the wolves behind and before the sun in *Grimnismál* and *Heiðreks saga*.

136 *SnEGylf*, 49.

137 Given the other instances of binding and oral incapacitation on the Gosforth Cross, it may also be relevant that, according to one myth, Loki had his lips sewn together by dwarves; *SnESkald*, I, 43; Wanner, 'Sewn Lips'.

on Loki's face and he writhes, causing earthquakes. Parallels with the correspondingly placed, but differently styled, 'Baldr'-figure and the snake-like knot on the south face seem likely: both the criminal (Loki) and his victim (Baldr) end up in captivity, from which the former will be released before Ragnarøk and the latter after. This parallel is reinforced by another. Immediately above the Loki-Sigyn scene on the west face is an inverted rider who, except for the inversion, parallels the mounted 'Óðinn/Týr'-figure on the south face—we therefore have three corresponding images in sequence. The identity of the inverted rider is unclear, but it may also be Óðinn/Týr, shown upside down in anticipation of death.

Above the inverted rider is a horizontal but standing figure. Judging from his horn, he is the divine watchman Heimdallr. He appears on the same face as Loki, with whom, according to *Gylfaginning*, he will fight to the death at Ragnarøk. Here, however, Heimdallr is merely holding his horn out from his body in one hand, rather than raising it to his mouth to herald Ragnarøk's arrival (*Völuspá* 46). As such, it is apparently *before* Ragnarøk that he has placed his other hand on a staff that props open the gums, and therewith the outermost jaws, of the lower two wolf-heads of the wolf-snake immediately above him.¹³⁸ The natural inference is that he has placed the staff there. In my view, this scene depicts a form of another myth told in *Gylfaginning*.

According to Snorri, after Fenrir had *gapði ákafliga* 'gaped mightily' and tried to bite the gods, they fettered him. They also *skutu í munn honum sverði nokkvoru* 'shoved in his mouth a certain sword' as a *gómssparri* 'gum-spar',¹³⁹ with its hilt against his lower gum, and its

138 S. Cöllern, *Heimdallr—der rätselhafte Gott: eine philologische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Berlin, 2015), 174, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110421958> similarly sees a staff ('einem Stab') propping open the monster's mouth. Calverley, *Notes*, 147 sees a staff holding back 'Hel worms'; Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 36 and Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 128 see Heimdallr holding out a spear to check the monsters. The worn state of the monument prevents certainty, but I can discern no spearhead on what I therefore take to be a staff. Either way, I believe that it functions as a prop between the outer jaws, not as a barrier before them. For further thoughts on oral incapacitation in Old Norse, see Wanner, 'Sewn Lips'.

139 The same 'gum-prop' is mentioned earlier as a kenning for 'sword' in Einarr Skúlason's mid-twelfth-century poem *Geisli* 'Beam of Light'; Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 46–7. A stanza from the anonymous skaldic *Stríðkeravísur* 'Grief-Pick's Verses', of similar date, refers to the prop as a *tugga* '(chewed) mouthful'; *PTP*, 628–9. Cf. Snarvendill's implicit stretching of Ýma's wolfish 'lower mouth' in

point against his upper gum. Consequently, Fenrir howled horribly and slaver ran from his mouth in a river called *Ván* 'Expectation/Hope'.¹⁴⁰ Much later, at Ragnarök, he will break free from his bonds and *ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjöptr við himni en hinn neðri við jörðu*. *Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til* 'go with gaping mouth and the upper jaw will be against the sky and the lower against the earth. He would gape more if there were room to'.¹⁴¹

Essential elements of this myth seem to appear here on the west face. The Gosforth-carver apparently knew a version of these events in which Heimdallr—possibly enacting the gods' collective will—separated Fenrir's gums with a staff, rather than a sword. It would make sense for Heimdallr to perform this action, for two reasons.

Firstly, there are strong grounds for thinking that Heimdallr was identified as a male sheep, which would make him tempting food with which to worsen Fenrir's torture by (it seems to me) tantalization. As potential prey, we may compare Heimdallr with his horn to the antlered stag pursued by Fenrir on the south face,¹⁴² which is similarly the fourth figure from the bottom. The basis for comparison might be strengthened by the finding that an Old Norse term for 'ram' was *heimdali* 'home-stag(?)'.¹⁴³ Also encouraging the comparison is Heimdallr's whiteness in Old Norse texts—he is *hvítastr Ása* 'the whitest of Æsir/gods' and the *hvíti Áss* 'white god'¹⁴⁴—this probably being a quality which the 'horned' god shared not just with the ram but also with the solar hart and the *Hvíta-Kristr* 'White Christ', with whom, in turn, the solar hart and the sun were identified.

Secondly, as *Heimdallr* 'Bright/Burgeoning Tree of Home' and *Hallinskiði* 'Leaning Stick', the Norse god was probably also identified

Hjálmpés saga (see Chapter 7). Gershenson, *Apollo*, 93 mistakenly identifies the prop on the Gosforth Cross as 'Thor's sword'.

140 *SnEGylf*, 29. For both senses of *ván*, see CV s.v.

141 *SnEGylf*, 50. As noted above, the *Hauksbók* text of *Völuspá* (55H) describes the snake gaping, not the wolf, and it omits details of the latter's death. The *Codex Regius* text says nothing about either monster gaping.

142 Heimdallr may also equate to Christ, the Lamb of God, on the east face, of whom the ram was a medieval 'type'.

143 Potentially sometimes one with a glowing, shining golden horn or horns (like the solar hart); see W. Sayers, 'Irish Perspectives on Heimdallr', *alvissmál* 2 (1993), 3–30 at 9, 26–7.

144 *Þrymskviða* 15; *SnEGylf*, 25.

with the world-tree as *axis mundi*.¹⁴⁵ It therefore seems reasonable to infer that the staff Heimdallr used as a gum-prop was either the trunk of the world-tree itself (the staff on the Gosforth Cross is the same height as Heimdallr), which was *heiðvanr* ‘accustomed to brightness’ (*Völuspá* 27), or perhaps rather a branch thereof, which, judging from *Svipdagsmál*, may have been radiant.¹⁴⁶ What other tree could supply a prop tall or strong enough to separate the jaws of such a monstrous wolf?

Further, we might identify the gum-prop-branch(?) as a sun-*beam*, more specifically as the meteorological phenomenon known as a ‘sun-pillar’. As this name suggests, a sun-pillar is a tall, thin shaft of sunlight which, depending on the sun’s position, extends either upward from the horizon into the sky or downward from the sun to the horizon.¹⁴⁷ For a wolf desperate to devour the sun, to have its jaws propped open by a solar shaft would have been the most tantalizing torture.

No textual source records what happened to the gum-prop at Ragnarøk, but for Fenrir to destroy the entire sun, it must have broken, become dislodged or been removed. The Gosforth Cross’s west face might offer clues to its fate (as might the east, as we shall see later).

One such clue on the west face may be the peculiar arrangement of the twin wolf-heads next to Heimdallr, which look to be at once propped (upper jaws) and unpropped (lower jaws). I interpret this arrangement as an economical artistic device—effectively a static animation—by which to communicate in the same space the transition of a single wolf-head from a propped to an unpropped state. As such, this design

145 Andrén, *Tracing*, 140–1 interprets a gilded pendant from Västergötland, dated to the early fifth century AD, as showing ‘the world tree reaching to the sky as well as the underworld’. Within the tree are representations of the sun at sunrise, noon and sunset, and in the underworld. I would add that the tree’s branches curl like ram’s horns and terminate in heads resembling those of sheep. It may be, therefore, that the notion of Heimdallr as both world-tree and ram has deep roots in solar tradition.

146 On Heimdallr, a complex, enigmatic god, see Sayers, ‘Irish Perspectives’; Tolley, *Shamanism*, I, 369–405; Cöllen, *Heimdallr*. Curiously, Snorri also records that *Heimdalar sverð er kallat höfuð* ‘the head is called “Heimdallr’s sword”’ (*SnEGylf*, 25–6). This is probably mainly because a ram uses its head as a weapon, but an association between a sun-drenched branch from the ‘crown’ of the world-tree and a shining twig-sword might also be entertained.

147 It is caused by the reflection of sunlight by atmospheric ice crystals, usually around sunrise or sunset. For photographs, see ‘Light Pillar’, in *Wikipedia* (4 April 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_pillar. The tall, thin form of the Gosforth Cross might itself, in addition to representing a tree, suggest this phenomenon, or at least a sunbeam.

parallels, albeit in different form, the correspondingly placed pairing of ‘gagged’ wolf-snake and ‘freed’ wolf-snake on the south face.

A second clue on the west face is the nature of the snake-body joined to the twin side-by-side wolf-heads. Two fairly short ‘knot’-patterns, one attached to each wolf-head, connect to a single snake-body that is wider, longer and of markedly different appearance. Its pattern also appears on the east face, though apparently not as a snake-body. There it rather resembles a rolling cloud of smoke, fire or poison emitted from the lower mouth of what is presumably the same snake. I suggest that, on the west face, this cloud-like design similarly denotes smoke, fire or poison, but contained *within* the monster’s body, which is attached to a single wolf-head whose *unpropped* jaws gape at the sun-cross above. Together, the disappearance of the solar(?) staff-prop and the progression from ‘knot’-body to ‘cloud/smoke/fire/poison’-body may suggest the monster’s acquisition and internalization of heavenly fire. *Gylfaginning* offers some support for this interpretation, firstly by implying that Fenrir’s gaping at Ragnarøk is now voluntary — *Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til* ‘He would gape more if there were room to’;¹⁴⁸ secondly by indicating that *eldar brenna ór augum hans ok nǫsum* ‘fires burn from his eyes and nostrils’;¹⁴⁹ and thirdly by recording how *Miðgarðsormr blæss svá eitrinu at hann dreifir lopt ǫll ok lög, ok er hann allógurligr, ok er hann á aðra hlið úlfinum* ‘Miðgarðsormr blows out poison so that it bespatters all the sky and sea, and he is very terrible, and he is on the other side of the wolf’.¹⁵⁰ Since Fenrir’s fieriness was not mentioned earlier, it perhaps derived from his consumption of the sun or part thereof. From the Gosforth Cross I tentatively infer that the wolf-snake’s fieriness at this point derives at least partly from having swallowed the staff-prop. We may find another clue to this effect when we examine the east face. For now, though, we should appreciate that it is but a short step from this staff-prop to the sword-prop of *Gylfaginning*, given that *sparri* (in *góm-sparri*) literally denotes ‘a length of wood to hold something apart’.¹⁵¹ This finding, together with the Norse concept of the twig-sword, makes it easy to suppose that one version of the myth of Fenrir’s torture might

148 *SnEGylf*, 50.

149 Snorri’s source for this detail is unknown. Neither text of *Völuspá* records that Fenrir was fiery.

150 *SnEGylf*, 50.

151 *SnEGylf*, 101 s.v. *góm-sparri*.

have featured a sword and another a staff.¹⁵² And in that case, if Fenrir did swallow the prop, we may recall the wolfish Vargeisa's transference of the radiant sword Snarvendill between her hand and mouth;¹⁵³ the greed of Grendel's wolfish mother for swords, including presumably the sun-like giant sword; and perhaps the protracted trembling of the fish-hall Lýr, dwelling place of the sun-bright Menglǫð, on a weapon-point in *Soipdagsmál*.¹⁵⁴

Turning to the badly worn north face, I read its carvings from top to bottom. This change of direction is immediately suggested by the downward course of the single-headed wolf-snake at the top of the shaft. It is curious that it has only one head, but that this monster is probably the same wolf-snake is indicated by its tail apparently ending in a loop through which passes a cord that leads to the cross-head.¹⁵⁵ In other words, the lunar wolf-snake and the sun now seem to be in syzygy in the context of a solar eclipse (as may be anticipated on the south face), with the former apparently towing the latter. This accords with the monster's apparent volte-face: its capture of the sun is a pivotal turn of events.

The monster's body also looks markedly different. It now appears skeletal, perhaps due to the burning of its flesh by the sun or its long starvation by the gods.¹⁵⁶ Either way, the monster's downward-facing head gapes to attack a new victim: a rider holding a downward-pointing spear. He is shown in mirror-image, first upright and then upside down, and he strongly resembles the mirrored riders on the south and west faces. He could well be Óðinn again, first alive (upright) before his swallowing by Fenrir, and then dead (upside down)—Óðinn,

152 If Fenrir did swallow the sword, it is conceivable that he was, in a sense, swallowing a second divine hand, as we have seen that a sword is conceptually an extension of the wielder's arm and that in Old Norse a sword may be called a *hnefi* 'fist' with *benknúar* 'wound-knuckles'. The knuckle-like pommels of some Scandinavian swords may also be noted.

153 Note that Fenrir is presumably the 'vargr of Víðarr's kinsman [i.e., Óðinn or Loki]' (*vargs ... Víðars niðja*) in the *Hauksbók* text of *Völuspá* (55H).

154 For Lýr 'Pollack/Pike' as a potentially *wolfish* hall, see Chapter 16.

155 The drawing in Figure 4 looks to me slightly inaccurate here.

156 Calverley, *Notes*, 164, however, sees Surtr 'riding at the head of the fiery flying sons of Muspell (the personification of fire)'. Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 38 similarly sees Surtr, and observes that 'this monster has a larger eye than the other monsters on the cross, and a large eye is an attribute of fire-demons'. If that is the case, I would rather explain this feature as a consequence of the wolf-snake's capture of the sun.

the all-seeing god of the single blazing eye, potentially having a solar aspect.¹⁵⁷ Below the 'dead' image of the warrior is a large 'knot'-pattern, perhaps symbolic of the inescapable fetters of death.

I also read the east face from top to bottom. Immediately below the sun-cross we see another variation on the twin-headed wolf-snake, this time with a knot- or lattice-like body similar to the twin-body-pattern of the monster facing Heimdallr on the west face.¹⁵⁸ That the monster is no longer skeletal perhaps indicates that it has eaten Óðinn. A certain person has one foot placed on the lower jaw of the monster's lower head, and one hand placed under its upper jaw, so that its mouth gapes, revealing a forked serpentine tongue.¹⁵⁹ At this moment in time, the person is effectively propping the monster's jaws open, in which case the scene parallels the 'gagged' but gaping wolf-snake similarly placed on the south face. Another parallel is with Heimdallr and his staff-prop on the west face, especially as the person's other hand holds a staff very similar to Heimdallr's *away* from the monster's mouth. As others have noted, the scene with the person standing on the wolf-snake's lower jaw must be a version of the myth of the god Víðarr killing Fenrir as told in *Gylfaginning*. In Snorri's account *Víðarr* 'Wide-Ruler(?)' (the name may pun on *viðari* 'wider') avenges his father, Óðinn, by adopting the same position and tearing apart Fenrir's jaws.¹⁶⁰

Immediately beneath the Víðarr-figure is a recurrence of the 'cloud/smoke/fire'-design that forms most of the wolf-snake's body on the west face. Here, though, as noted earlier, it appears to denote a moving cloud of smoke, fire or poison. I identify it as the monster's breath, through which Víðarr has walked, rather as Beowulf did to kill the fire-dragon

157 Cf. remarks on Óðinn's use of the *gambanteinn* in Chapters 7 and 16. Less likely, I think, the figure could be Týr confronting a creature equatable with Garmr (hence the difference in the appearance of the wolf-snake?), as *Gylfaginning* pits this pair against each other to their mutual destruction (*SnEGylf*, 50).

158 For reticulation as a symbol of the eclipsing moon, imagined as 'a filter-like cloth through which the eclipsed sun shines with a subdued light', see E. G. Suhr, 'The Daughter of the Dragon', *Folklore* 80 (1969), 1–11 at 5–6.

159 The monster's forked tongue appears comparable to the pitchfork employed by the sun-assaulting wolfish troll of *Völuspá* 40 (if my interpretation is correct) and to the various forks described in analogues thereof.

160 *SnEGylf*, 50–1. In *Völuspá*, however, Fenrir dies differently. There is no mention there of Víðarr tearing the wolf's jaws apart. Instead, *lætr hann megi Hveðrungs mund um standa / hjör til hjarta* 'with his hand [or *mundum* 'hands'] he lets a sword stand at the heart of Hveðrungr's kinsman [i.e., Fenrir]' (55). *Vafþrúðnismál* 53 says that Víðarr will *klyfja* 'cleave' the wolf's cold jaws in battle.

he faced.¹⁶¹ I infer that the wolf-snake breathed out fire or venom before Víðarr killed it, which may partly explain why its body—shown at the point of death—is not now composed of the cloud/smoke/fire-design seen on the west face. I also suggest, albeit without support from textual sources, that the staff Víðarr holds in his other hand does not just resemble Heimdallr's staff-prop but *is* that very sunbeam/solar pillar, which Víðarr has extracted from the inwards of the doomed beast; this could further explain why its body is no longer composed of the cloud/smoke/fire-like design. In tearing apart the sun-devouring Fenrir, Víðarr extracts the sun or at least a sunbeam. We may, I suggest, compare the liberation of Snarvendill from the wolfish Vargeisa, the taking of the giant sword from Grendel's wolfish mother, and less obviously Menglǫð's implicit liberation from Lýr. If so, the staff in Víðarr's hand may anticipate the first visible sunbeam at dawn—appropriately for the first scene on the cross's *east* face.

Further down the east face the wolf-snake's breath approaches a representation of the crucified Christ, who perhaps subsumes Óðinn hanging on the world-tree.¹⁶² It is important to note that Christ is shown dead, albeit in a 'standing', implicitly unconquered, position with his head upright. That he is lifeless is clear from the depiction beneath him of the soldier mentioned in *John* 19:34 who, following Christ's death, pierced the Saviour's side with a spear, causing blood and water to gush forth. Since the sun was obscured at Christ's death, and since Christ was commonly identified with the sun, the Gosforth Cross's crucified Christ—implicitly identifiable also with the solar cross-head and the solar hart on the south face¹⁶³—participates in the monument's overarching theme of the sun's destruction by a wolf-headed snake, who, from a Christian perspective, represents the variously lupine and serpentine Devil.

161 Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 29, however, identifies it as 'a headless creature, the incarnation of all evil, slain'. Another possibility is that this design, like the 'cloud' comprising the upper part of the wolf-snake's body on the west face, might symbolize the moon's shadow during a solar eclipse; cf. Suhr, 'Griffon', 220–2.

162 On this figure's relationship to Óðinn, see Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 29; T. H. Ohlgren, 'The Pagan Iconography of Christian Ideas: Tree-Lore in Anglo-Viking England', *Mediaevistik* 1 (1988), 145–73 at 154–60.

163 Since the wolf-head at the top of the east face is also attacking a cross, both this monster's heads are effectively doing the same thing. The Christ figure may also be implicitly identified with the similarly positioned Heimdallr on the west face and the inverted Óðinn/Týr on the north face.

But that, of course, is not the end of the story. In both religious traditions, the forces of evil, symbolized by wolf and snake, are destroyed and the sun returns. As we have seen, in Norse mythology, the female sun had a daughter who was destined to succeed her in the post-Ragnarøk age. Similarly, Christ the Sun was reborn at Easter.¹⁶⁴ Hence beneath Christ, the soldier and his valkyrie-like female companion on the Gosforth Cross,¹⁶⁵ we see one final representation of the wolf-snake.¹⁶⁶ This time its twin heads are attacking each other and, judging by its juxtaposition with the fettered 'Baldr' on the south face, the fettered Loki on the west-face and the knot-pattern on the north face, the beast has been consigned to a fettered confinement in Hel(l).¹⁶⁷

Hunted Stags on Other Anglo-Saxon Crosses

If the wolf-hunted stag on the Gosforth Cross is solar, this raises the possibility that other hunted stags carved on other crosses of similar date from northern England may have a similar aspect, with or without heathen associations. Among the surviving Anglo-Saxon carvings of hunted stags, I find four noteworthy:¹⁶⁸

- (a) A fragment of a tenth- or eleventh-century cross-head from Winston on Tees, Durham shows a pair of antlered stags, one on either side of a circle containing a ring of pellets around a partially obliterated central cross—a sun-cross.¹⁶⁹ One of each of the stags' antlers is fused with the circle, thereby

164 The stream of liquid shown flowing from Christ's side above the soldier might also allude to the return of light after darkness, as Longinus (as the soldier was called in medieval tradition) was often imagined to have been blind until Christ's blood fell upon his eyes.

165 Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 30–2 identifies her as a personification of Ecclesia (the Church) advancing to gather Christ's blood in a chalice.

166 Cf. *Luke* 10:19.

167 The Gosforth Cross may also be compared with much earlier Gotlandic picture-stones which probably focus on the sun. They show paired serpents and other monsters that arguably envelope or threaten the sun, horned quadrupeds, the underworld and, in one case, the world-tree; see Andrén, *Tracing*, 136–9, 145, 156.

168 On the 'hart and hound' motif in northern sculpture, see further Berg, 'Gosforth Cross', 39; Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 72, 172, 174, 220; 'Ellerburn 05, Eastern Yorkshire', http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/catvol_search_results.php?id=724; 'Stonegrave 07, Eastern Yorkshire', http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/catvol_search_results.php?id=867

169 Cramp, *Corpus*, I, part 1, 145–6; part 2, pl. 147 (774).

identifying them as solar antlers of solar (Christ-)stags. The left-hand stag appears to balk at a quadruped—presumably an attacking wolf or dog—immediately before it and below the solar disc.

- (b) Beneath a wheeled sun-cross, one side of a tenth-century cross-shaft from Middleton, East Yorkshire depicts a stag-hunt.¹⁷⁰ At the foot of a carved scene stands a large-antlered stag. Above this stag, descending vertically upon its hindquarters, are two wolves or dogs, a larger one above a smaller one. To their right, above the stag's antlers, stands a warrior with a downward-pointing spear in his right hand and a sword or long knife in his left. The other side of the cross-shaft shows a large, fettered dragon, quite possibly gagged. In terms of Norse mythology, the stag-hunt may represent the celestial wolves Sköll and Hati, perhaps under the direction of a huntsman personifying the acquisitive moon (the Man in the Moon?), attacking a solar hart. The bound dragon on the other side of the cross-shaft may symbolize the dark-moon dragon Niðhöggr,¹⁷¹ or another snake of Germanic myth, bound in defeat. From a Christian perspective, the stag-hunt probably symbolizes the death of Christ (the stag) on the Cross and the loss of sunlight at that time; the bound serpent would be the conquered Devil.
- (c) One face of a damaged cross-shaft from Sockburn, Durham, which dates from the third quarter of the tenth century, shows, in the lowermost of three surviving carved panels, a left-facing stag with large antlers.¹⁷² In the panel above it stands a left-facing helmeted warrior with upward-facing spear in one hand and the hilt of his sword in the other. The fragmentary panel above the warrior contains a plaited design. Another face shows, on the same level as the aforementioned stag, a wolf or dog looking back over its shoulder, presumably at the stag. Above the wolf or dog are two plaitwork designs. The other two sides show serpent-like coil patterns, in one case

170 See 'Middleton 01, Eastern Yorkshire', http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/catvol_search_results.php?id=800

171 See Murphy, *Tree*, 106–19.

172 Cramp, *Corpus*, I, 138; part 2, pl. 134 (726–9).

above a triquetra. This cross's iconography appears broadly comparable to that on the Middleton cross.

- (d) A tenth- or eleventh-century cross-shaft from Dacre, Cumbria shows a large, right-facing, antlered stag with a dog or wolf on its back.¹⁷³ Between the stag's fore and hind legs, it seems to me, is a large square block that might represent a sacrificial altar for the stag. This scene surmounts a depiction of the Fall of Man, with Eve on the left picking the fateful apple from a snake-entwined tree with a block-like base, to the right of which stands Adam. Above the stag-scene is a likely depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac, with Abraham on the left of Isaac, the pair separated by a sacrificial block. One of the stag's antlers extends upwards between the legs of Isaac, linking the two scenes and suggesting an identification of the two figures. Similarly, Isaac's head is between the forelegs of the quadruped—a ram(?)—carved above him, again suggesting a connection. The stag, Isaac and the ram were all 'types' of Christ, who was sacrificed on the Cross, of which the tree of Eden, shown here with an altar-like block as a base, was a 'type'. There is no apparent heathen dimension to this cross's carvings and no clear solar imagery survives, but it would be no surprise if the now headless shaft had originally been topped by a sun-cross.

The Ovingham Stone

One side of a fragmentary cross-shaft from Ovingham, Northumbria also appears relevant to this topic, although it features no stag and its worn carving is hard to interpret.¹⁷⁴ It has, however, been plausibly explained as a Ragnarök-scene.¹⁷⁵

It shows two figures on either side of a quadruped—presumably a wolf or dog, but one with a curiously elongated body (another wolf-snake?). The beast gapes toward a comparatively small circle, perhaps representing a weak sun or the moon, immediately above its mouth.

173 Bailey and Cramp, *Corpus*, II, 91–2, illustrations 240, 245–6.

174 Cramp, *Corpus*, I, part 1, 215–6; part 2, pl. 210 (1199).

175 Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture*, 133–4.

The figure on the right bears in his right hand what looks like a large curved horn or perhaps a weapon (a scythe?). If it is a horn, this would probably identify him as Heimdallr, as on the Gosforth Cross. The thin end of his horn appears to pass through (or behind?) the animal's belly.

The figure on the left apparently has two arms around the animal's neck. The back of his head has a curious curled appendage. Perhaps this represents long hair or part of a hat. Alternatively, it might be a ram's horn and therefore part of a (second?) representation of Heimdallr.

One Man (in the Moon) and His Dog

Finally in this chapter, I adduce later medieval and post-medieval English traditions about the mythological figure of the Man in the Moon. I do so partly by way of introduction to the allied theme of solar theft to which I turn in the next chapter. Although these traditions do not record that the Man hunted a solar stag as such, they do indicate a belief that he had a dog and that he stole branches or sticks—originally symbolic, I propose, of *shafts* of sunlight, of *sunbeams*. Since many dogs enjoy fetching and carrying sticks, this was perhaps a crime in which his canine assisted.

A seal of a certain Walter de Grendon, dating from the 1330s, shows the Man within a thin crescent moon. He carries a bundle of sticks on his back with the aid of a long-shafted wooden tool (a fork?), the other end of which he raises toward the upper of two six-pointed stars, which may well represent the very bright 'morning star(s)' Venus and/or Sirius, the Dog Star.¹⁷⁶ To the right of the Man is a dog—a small and distinctly unterrifying specimen—which looks up at him excitedly,¹⁷⁷ perhaps in anticipation of his master's capture of the latter star. Surrounding

176 The speaker of the probably early seventeenth-century English poem *Tom o' Bedlam's Song* declares, in stanza 6, that the moon 'doth horne y^e star of morne' or, in a variant reading, 'doth horn The Stars of the Morn'; R. Graves, *The Crowning Privilege: Collected Essays on Poetry* (New York, 1956), 221–38 at 223–4; a related poem, 'Loving Mad Tom', also refers to the moon's morning 'Horning' (*ibid.*, 230). Cf., in Chapter 14 below, the probably lunar Norse hunchback called Kolr who glues stars to stud(s) of horses.

177 Rev. T. Harley, *Moon Lore* (London, 1885), 28–9; K. Zarins, 'Caliban's God: The Medieval and Renaissance Man in the Moon', in M. W. Driver and S. Ray (ed.), *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings* (Jefferson, 2009), 245–62 at 248.

the whole scene is an ambiguous Latin inscription: *Te Waltere dicebo cur spinas phebo gero*. This is translatable as either 'I will tell you, Walter, why I bear thorns from Phoebus [i.e., the sun]' or 'I will tell you, Walter, why I bear thorns to/on Phoebe [i.e., the moon]'. The ambiguity is perhaps deliberate.¹⁷⁸

Subsequently, Ben Jonson's masque entitled *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* mentions both the Man's 'dog at his girdle' and 'the bush of thorns at his back'; one character identifies these as 'stale ensigns of the stage's man in the moon, delivered down to you by musty antiquity'.¹⁷⁹ William Shakespeare also confirms that the Man's dog and thornbush were traditional by mentioning them in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.259) and *The Tempest* (2.2.141).¹⁸⁰

Earlier, in the late twelfth century, Alexander Neckham quoted a Latin saying identifying the image of the *Rusticus in luna* 'Peasant in the Moon', burdened by thorns, as an exemplification of the profitlessness of robbery, but he mentions no dog.¹⁸¹

Another source, the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Middle English poem known as *Mon in the mone*,¹⁸² similarly makes no mention of a dog, but conceives of the Man as a peasant pilferer with a burden of thorny sticks, as do later sources.¹⁸³ In this poem the man bears the sticks on a *bot-forke* 'boatfork'.¹⁸⁴ He has, in this source, illicitly gathered thorny sticks to repair a manorial hedge. But if this is a rustic debasement of an earlier mythological idea that the moon stole sunbeams, the Man's thorny sticks could then be comparable to the *rune-staves* which symbolize piercing solar rays in medieval Norse poems that I shall discuss later.¹⁸⁵ Walter de Grendon's seal invites this

178 Zarins, 'Caliban's God', 248, 259 n. 12 argues for the translation 'on the moon'.

179 O. F. Emerson, 'Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English', *PMLA* 21 (1906), 831–929 at 843–4. Emerson (844, 869, n. 1, 873, n. 3) attributes the dog to Jewish tradition about Cain. That Cain was sometimes associated with a dog is of interest, given the similar association of his descendants—Grendel and his mother—with wolves in *Beowulf*.

180 On the Man in the latter play, see Zarins, 'Caliban's God'.

181 R. J. Menner, 'The Man in the Moon and Hedging', *JEGP* 48 (1949), 1–14 at 3.

182 R. T. Davies (ed.), *Medieval English Lyrics: A Critical Anthology* (London, 1963), 71–3; see also Menner, 'Man in the Moon'.

183 Cf. *EDD* s.v. *nitch*, sb.1: 'The stolen bush borne by the Man in the Moon is still called the "nitch".'

184 I return to this word in Chapter 14.

185 Suhr, 'Maerchen', 278 suggests the Man's thorny sticks may be 'a development from the flashing rays of the corona guarding the black disk of the moon'. A partial

suggestion. Another possible clue to this interpretation comes toward the end of the Middle English poem, when the poet addresses the Man as *Hubert, hosede pie* 'Hubert, hosed magpie'. The magpie is a bird not only 'stained' like the Man but notorious as a supposed pilferer of *shiny* objects.¹⁸⁶

To my knowledge, no post-Conquest medieval English text describes the Man, his dog, or even just the moon, as a taker of the sun or sunlight. Later, however, Shakespeare attests this tradition in *Timon of Athens* (4.3.437–8): 'the moon's an arrant thief, / And her pale fire she snatches from the sun'.

Returning to pre-Conquest England, to my knowledge no Anglo-Saxon source mentions the Man. However, as we shall see in Chapter 14, traditions about such a figure appear illuminating for the

literary basis for the Man's sticks may be *Numbers* 15:32–6, which tell of a man stoned to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath (i.e., Sunday to Christians); see Zarins, 'Caliban's God', 248; C. Kren, 'The Medieval Man in the Moon', *Mediaevalia* 7 (1981), 221–38 at 221, which also observes that late medieval schoolmen rarely mention the burdened-Man tradition.

186 Note also that *Hubert* derives from either OE *Hygebeorht* or OHG *Hugubert*, both of which mean 'Mind/Heart-Bright'. On the Man's identification with the magpie, see also Menner, 'Man in the Moon', 12–4. The Hubert-reference warrants brief examination in the context of the immediately surrounding words: *Hupe forth! Hubert, hosede pie. / Ichot th'art amarscled into the mawe* (37–8). The meaning of line 38 in particular has prompted debate, especially about *amarscled*, with a recent contributor concluding that the line's sense is either 'I know that you are confused to the innards' or 'I know that you are completely under a spell'; M. Stenroos, 'A-marscled in "The Man in the Moon"', *N&Q* 55 (2008), 400–4 at 404. In my view, the distinct possibility raised by Stenroos's article that *amarscled* means 'fascinated', the connections Stenroos makes with Old English words associated with evil beings and the temptations of the devil, and the poet's preceding exclamation *the Del him to-drawe!* '(may) the Devil tear him apart!', together suggest that the poem's climax may rather envisage Hubert in a state of fascination between the jaws of a devouring monster, perhaps especially a serpent, from which the poet urges him to 'hop forth'; cf. M. Rissanen, 'Colloquial and Comic Elements in *The Man in the Moon*', *NM* 81 (1980), 42–6 which asserts on p. 46 that the translation of *into the mawe* as 'to the core' (essentially Stenroos's approach) 'sounds somewhat artificial'; *MED* s.v. *mawe* first attests the sense 'jaws; throat, gullet' in the late fourteenth century, so this would be an earlier instance, but not dramatically so. A mid-nineteenth-century citation in the *OED* (s.v. 'fascination') may point to the intended idea: 'The fascination of the serpent on the bird held her mute and frozen'. The two lines might be translated 'Hop forth, Hubert, (you) hosed magpie! I know you're fascinated into the maw (i.e., jaws)'; cf. the Middle English tale of Hubert the kite eaten by a fox, noted by Rissanen, 'Colloquial', 45, and his additional suggestion (46 n. 19) that *amarscled* might relate to Middle English *mors(c)el* 'bite', 'mouthful' or Old French *morsillier* 'bite'. The image of Hubert in the jaws of a devouring monster in *Mon in the mone* could allude to either a waning moon or a lunar eclipse.

interpretation of *Beowulf*. For now, it will suffice to observe that the fact that the moon derives its light from the sun was known in Anglo-Saxon England from quite an early date, though apparently by far from all. Bede refers to *Luna ... et stellae, quae non proprio ut dicunt, sed adventitio, et a sole mutuato lumine fulgent* ‘the Moon and stars, which shine, not with their own light (as they say), but with an adventitious light borrowed from the Sun’.¹⁸⁷ Later, Ælfric similarly states: *Sodlice se mona ond ealle steorran underfoð leoht of ðære micclan sunnan. Ond heora nan næfð nænne leoman buton of ðære sunnan leoman*¹⁸⁸ ‘Truly, the moon and all the stars receive light from the great sun. And none of them have any radiance except from the sun’s light’.

A few Old English poems show that some Anglo-Saxons conceived of the moon not as a luminary shining of its own accord or as an adventitious beneficiary of the sun’s light, but as a thief or robber of sunshine. I end this chapter by quoting one of them. In his *Metres of Boethius* (4), King Alfred the Great (849–99), observed that:

Blacum leohte beorhte steorran
 mona gemetgað ðurh ðinra meahta sped;
 hwilum eac þa sunnan sines bereafað
 beorhtan leohtes, þonne hit gebyrgan mæg
 þæt swa geneahst nede weorðað. (8–12)¹⁸⁹

With pale light¹⁹⁰ the moon moderates the bright stars through the efficacy of your [i.e., God’s] powers. At times, it also robs¹⁹¹ the sun of its bright light, when it may happen¹⁹² that, by necessity, they become so very proximate.

Here the eclipsing moon is a reaver of sunlight in a solar eclipse. In the next chapter we examine an Old English riddle that portrays the moon

187 Bede, *De temporum ratione*, chapter 6 (PL 90, col. 318); translation from F. Wallis (trans.), *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool, 1988, corr. rpt. 2004), 25; Bede makes similar statements in chapters 50 and 64; Wallis, *Bede*, 132, 152. More generally on this theme, see Cashford, *Moon*, 163.

188 Blake, *Ælfric’s De Temporibus Anni*, 80 (adapted). Note also *ibid.*, 90: *heo hine atent* ‘it [i.e., the sun] kindles it [i.e., the moon]’.

189 Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, 18.

190 Cf. the *blacne leoman* in Grendel’s mere (1517).

191 Cf. how the moon *wyrð ... bereafad* ‘becomes bereaved/robbed’ of its light by clouds and darkness in *Metres of Boethius* (28), quoted in Chapter 14.

192 Given the context of a solar eclipse, there may be wordplay on other senses of (*ge*) *byr(i)gan*: ‘taste, eat’ and ‘bury’.

as a creature who stole sunlight in apparently more mundane, daily circumstances—light which the sun, or a solar emissary, then reclaimed. This text, like an Old English charm which seems to draw on related heathen mythology (treated in Chapter 12), will prove a valuable analogue for clarifying and enriching our understanding of Grendel, his mother and their possession of the giant sword.

II. A Tale of Two Creatures

The Theft and Recovery of Sunlight in *Riddle 29*

In this chapter I examine a short Old English poem in which we meet a *wiht* 'creature' (grammatically feminine) who is evidently a thief of sunlight. I shall suggest that this creature is functionally analogous to Grendel. We also encounter another *wiht* (again grammatically feminine) who recovers the pilfered sunlight, which is analogous in essence to the radiant giant sword. The latter creature seems to me functionally comparable to Beowulf.

Riddle 29 of the *Exeter Book* reads:

Ic wiht geseah wundorlice
hornum bitweonum hupe lædan,
lyftfæt leohtlic listum gegierwed,
hupe to þam ham of þam heresiþe.
Walde hyre on þære byrig bur atimbram,
searwum asettan, gif hit swa meahte.
Ða cwom wundorlicu wiht ofer wealles hrof,
seo is eallum cuð eorðbuendum;
ahredde þa þa hupe ond to ham bedraf
wreccan ofer willan. Gewat hyre west þonan,
fæhþum feran, forð onette.
Dust stonc to heofonum, deaw feol on eorþan,
niht forð gewat. Nænig siþþan
wera gewiste þære wihte sið.¹

1 Adapted from Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, I, 309.

I saw a creature wonderfully carrying plunder between its horns, a radiant air-vessel/cup/plate, skilfully adorned, (as) plunder to the [i.e., its] home from the war-journey. It wanted to build a bower for it [i.e., the plunder] in the stronghold, to set it up craftily [or 'with/among contrivances/war-gear/artefacts'], if it could be so. Then a wonderful creature came over the wall's roof; it is known to all earth-dwellers; it then recaptured the plunder, and drove the exile/wanderer to its home against its will. It [i.e., the exile] departed west from there, journeying from the hostilities, hastened forth. Dust rose to the heavens, dew fell on the earth, night departed forth. Of men, none then knew the journey of that creature [i.e., the exile].

On one level, this poem treats the Christian theme of the Harrowing of Hell,² the apocryphal episode probably also evoked in the imagery of the mere-episode in *Beowulf*. More immediately, though, it describes the moon's theft of sunlight and the sun's recovery of its stolen radiance. The moon is imagined as an exiled, warlike creature who carried off a vessel of sunlight between its horns with the intention of setting it up—possibly on a wall—inside a *bur* 'bower' within a stronghold. However, before the moon-creature got home a second creature, the sun, rose into the sky, presumably at dawn, reclaimed the stolen light and drove the moon back home. The moon hastened westward. Dust rose, perhaps from the moon's hasty retreat or a conflict between the two creatures, and morning dew formed. Night then finally departed, at which point the moon's course was beyond mankind's ken. If this interpretation is correct, the riddle seems to have been inspired by the sight of the sun mounting the horizon at dawn, when it outshone a crescent moon which had lingered too long in the morning sky.

The physical form of the creature representing the sun is not described, but we can say a little more about the lunar creature. It is horned, so it is clearly not a wolf, as the Old Norse texts examined earlier may have led us to expect. If it is to be identified as any specific animal, as may be doubted, a snake appears only a remote possibility. It might rather be a stag, in which case its opponent, the solar creature, might also be cervine in keeping with the concept of the solar hart. What is clearer is that the lunar *wiht* bears a resemblance to Grendel in key respects, as does the solar *wiht* to Beowulf.

2 See P. J. Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles* (Pennsylvania, 2011), 123–39.

The Lunar Thief and Grendel

Grendel is similarly a *wiht* (*Beowulf* 120),³ one who lived in the home of *ælwihhta* ‘alien creatures’ (1500); more remarkably, he may well have been imagined to have a lunar head (see Chapter 14). Additionally, he was a nocturnal thief. As we have seen, in the back-story to *Beowulf*, he may have been principally a *heorowearh* ‘sword-thief’ (1267)—if my thesis is correct, specifically a stealer of the giant sword which shone like the sun.

Appreciation of Grendel’s larcenous nature is not reliant merely on interpretation of the unique word *heorowearh*. As we have seen, Grendel raided Heorot for bodies (those of *Beorht-Dene* ‘Bright-Danes’, 427, 609), which he stuffed into his glove and took home. Such behaviour is in keeping with his nature as a *þyrs* ‘giant’ (426). In Old English poetry, a close association between *þyrs* and *þeof* ‘thief’ is implied by the juxtaposition and alliterative pairing of these words in *Maxims II* (42): *Þeof sceal gangan þystrum wederum. Þyrs sceal on fenne gewunian* ‘A thief must walk in dark weather(s). A giant must dwell in the fen’.⁴ This line calls to mind Grendel, the fen-dwelling *þyrs* who dwelt in *þystrum* ‘darkness(es)’ (*Beowulf* 87), out of which, from a rainy mere, *com ... gongan* ‘he came walking’ (710–11) to Heorot by night, under the cover of *misthleopum* ‘misty hills’ and *wol(c)num* ‘clouds’ (710, 714). Similarly, Old Norse giants (*þursar*, *jötunar*) are thieves. They stole the gods’ possessions and guarded property pilfered from the gods: most famously, Þjazi stole the goddess Iðunn and her apples, and Þrymr guarded Þórr’s stolen lightning-hammer; it is probably no coincidence that the arch-thief Loki was similarly of giant-stock. Less prominently, a (horned?) giant called Faunus stole a gold-hilted sword,⁵ and another called *Hrossþjófr* ‘Horse-Thief’ presumably rustled horses;⁶ the robbery committed by the sisters of the troll-woman Ýma in *Hjálmpés saga* may also be recalled.⁷

3 As is the climactic dragon of *Beowulf* (3038), which appropriated and guarded treasure (including a fateful precious cup) in a walled chamber.

4 R. E. Bjork (ed. and trans.), *Old English Shorter Poems. Volume II: Wisdom and Lyric* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2014), 176.

5 See Chapter 12 n. 56.

6 *PTP*, 722–3.

7 Further evidence of thefts by Norse giants will be adduced in Chapter 14.

Furthermore, details about Grendel and his mother agree with ideas about thieves preserved in Old Norse sagas, which may offer insights into earlier Germanic concepts. In the sagas special opprobrium attaches to thievery, rather than robbery. The distinction seems to have been that thievery, of which estranged and sometimes intersexual persons were often accused, was characterized by secrecy, concealment and occasionally sorcery, whereas robbery was a matter of open violence.⁸ In this light, both Grendel and his mother fit the description of thieves, albeit extremely violent ones. Grendel's mother is an intersexual exile who under the cover of darkness attacks *Æschere on ræste* 'in his rest/bed' (1298), from which she abducts him, while also taking Grendel's sword-like arm and bringing it to her hidden home in a *dygel lond* 'secret land' (1357). Her son is an exiled *deogol dædhata* 'secret deed-hater/persecutor' (275), one belonging to a category of *dyrnra gasta* 'secret spirits' (1357), who practises magic. He preys on sleeping men by night (1580–3), a practice which in the morning becomes *gumum undyrne* 'un-secret to men' (127); he conceals them in a glove, and carries them to his secret home—a destination comparable to the swamp to which a sorcerer-thief called Þórólfr *sleggja* 'sledgehammer' is consigned in *Vatnsdæla saga*.⁹ Grendel's narrative function also appears comparable to that of the typical saga-thief, which, according to Theodore Andersson, is 'to instigate trouble, which then develops a life of its own and eventually engulfs everyone'.¹⁰ The likelihood that Grendel is a thief is bolstered by a passage from *Grettis saga* in which the eponymous hero, after being implicitly identified as one of the land's un-Christian *illvirkjar ok ránsmenn ok þjófar* 'evil-doers and robbers and thieves', is called a *margýgjusonr* 'son of a sea-giantess'.¹¹ Significantly, too, according to *Prymskviða*, Þórr's hammer was *stolinn* 'stolen' (another charged term) while the god slept, and buried by Þrymr, who lived with an old giantess.¹² Finally, for now, Grendel bears comparison to the thief who

8 See Andersson, 'Thief', an investigation into the nature of the thief of the dragon's cup which mentions neither Grendel nor Grendel's mother; also Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 487–90.

9 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Vatnsdæla saga*, 72–3; Andersson, 'Thief', 502.

10 Andersson, 'Thief', 506.

11 Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ÍF 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), 133; Andersson, 'Thief', 502.

12 See Chapter 5 for the relevance of *Prymskviða* to the middle part of *Beowulf*.

stole a precious cup from the slumbering dragon in the final part of *Beowulf*, a man whom Andersson describes as ‘a dispossessed outcast fleeing hostility, in need of refuge, and guilty of some misdoing’¹³—much the same can be said of Grendel.

Nor do the parallels between *Riddle 29*’s *wiht* and Grendel end there. Rather as the riddle’s *wrecca* ‘exile/wanderer’ intended to take plunder home (*huþe to þam ham*) after a martial expedition, so Grendel trod *wræclastas* ‘exile-paths’ (1352) and returned from a murderous trip to Heorot bearing *huðe* ‘plunder’ to his *ham* ‘home’ (124). Grendel’s plunder on that occasion was ‘Bright-Danes’ (427, 609), and he also dimmed the light of Heorot by his presence therein as a *deorc deapscua* ‘dark death-shadow’ (160) on *sweartum nihtum* ‘dark nights’ (167).

The Solar Repossessor and Beowulf

Riddle 29’s solar creature appears broadly to parallel Beowulf in its repossession of a solar treasure from a lunar thief. If my interpretation is correct, Grendel actually outdid the riddle’s lunar thief by reaching home with his solar plunder and putting it on display, but that is not a fundamental difference and it does not disguise suggestive correspondences.

The riddle’s reclaiming creature came *ofer wealles hrof* ‘over the wall’s roof’, the ‘wall’ here being a metaphor for the horizon, whose ‘roof’ is the sky, reclaimed its lost treasure, and drove the moon-creature away to its home against its will. Beowulf descended to a *hrofsele* ‘roofed hall’ (1515), where he dispatched the nocturnal Grendel, whom he had earlier effectively driven home against his will. If the riddle’s thief had reached home with his prize, he would have set it up in a *bur* ‘bower’, potentially a woman’s private chamber, in which case we may compare Beowulf’s discovery of the giant sword hanging *on wage* ‘on the wall’ (1662) near to Grendel’s mother. And rather as in the riddle the solar treasure may have been intended for placement above *searwum* ‘(other) artefacts’, so Beowulf discovered the giant sword hanging among *searwum* (1557). Beowulf then brought the treasure to the sun-like hall of Heorot, which, I suspect, was its rightful home.

13 Andersson, ‘Thief’, 493.

These parallels suggest that Beowulf may well play the role of the sun, or a solar emissary, in recovering a lost treasure symbolizing sunlight which had been stolen by a lunar creature. Subsequent chapters will strengthen the possibility that the lunar thief was Grendel in collaboration with his mother.

12. Another Tale of Two Creatures

The Loss and Recovery of the Solar Draught-Beast in *Wið Dweorh*

An understanding of *Riddle 29* may help elucidate a notoriously obscure Old English text, the meaning of which has long been debated. If the following new interpretation is broadly correct, it records another myth about the loss and concealment of sunlight (compare the giant sword) due to the actions of a horned creature possibly associated with the moon (compare Grendel), and that light's recovery by the sun or a solar emissary, described, as in the riddle, as a *wiht* 'creature' (compare Beowulf). If accepted, this interpretation attests to the wider presence of myths about the moon's theft of sunlight in Old English literature and encourages perception of the same basic theme in *Beowulf*.

The text in question is the somewhat riddle-like metrical charm *Wið dweorh* 'Against a dwarf/fever',¹ part of the *Lacnunga*. The fever could well be convulsive, as one late Old English medical text describes how a patient suffering from a tight chest or asthma at times *riþaþ* 'writhes/shakes(?)' as if *he on dueorge sy* 'he is on [or 'in', i.e., perhaps 'in a state of' or 'in the clutches of'] a *dueorg*'.² This fever was probably attributed to a type of mythological creature now better known from Norse mythology: a 'dwarf', OE *dweorh* (*dweorg*, *dueorg*) being cognate with ON *dvergr* 'dwarf'.³ Norse dwarves were a race of often nocturnal, chthonic beings

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- 1 See DOE s.v. *dweorg*, both senses of which apply here, since, I believe, a dwarf has caused a fever, quite likely convulsive.
 - 2 M. Löweneck (ed.), *Peri Didaxeon, eine Sammlung von Rezepten in englischer sprache aus dem 11./12. Jahrhundert* (Erlangen, 1896), 31; L. Sanborn, 'An Edition of British Library MS. Harley 6258 B: *Peri Didaxeon*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ottawa, 1983), 97, 148–54.
 - 3 The word's etymology is disputed; see G. Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (Leiden, 2013), s.v. **dwerǵa-*. Kroonen, however, proposes an attractive

who were famed as metalworkers and swordsmiths—they forged the sword Snarvendill, for instance. As we shall see later in this study, some were also identified with the moon and involved in myths about the theft and return of sunlight.

From a reference in the charm's initial prose instructions to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, we may infer that the patient could not sleep, that he or she had a *night-fever*. The full text reads:

+ Wið dweorh: man sceal niman VII lytle oflætan swylce man mid ofrað, and writan þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus,⁴ Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion. Þænne eft þæt galdor þæt heræfter cweð man sceal singan, ærest on þæt wynstre eare, þænne on þæt swiðre eare, þænne bufan þæs mannes moldan; and ga þænne an mædenman to and ho hit on his sweoran, and do man swa þry dagas; him bið sona sel.

'Her com ingangan inswiden⁵ wiht.

Hæfde him his haman on handa.

derivation from 'the strong verb **dvergan*- attested in MHG *zwerger* ... "to squeeze, press"'. If the early Germanic dwarf was imagined as both a 'squeezer/presser' and a 'squeezed/pressed one', this could explain otherwise puzzlingly disparate aspects of traditions about this type of creature: (a) its association with feverish convulsions and respiratory constriction in England and possibly Scandinavia/Iceland; (b) its traditionally small stature, in Norse lore perhaps partly attributable to the compressing weight of the heavens which four dwarves named after the cardinal points had to uphold (*SnEGylf*, 12); (c) its identification in Norse mythology, through at least the prominent dwarf called Niði, with the waning moon, which gives the impression of being squeezed (see Chapter 13); (d) its skill in Norse and German tradition as a smith, in which capacity it pressed metal by hammering. Prior studies of the Germanic dwarf include L. Motz, *The Wise One of the Mountain: Form, Function and Significance of the Subterranean Smith: A Study in Folklore* (Göppingen, 1983); P. Battles, 'Dwarfs in Germanic Literature: *Deutsche Mythologie* or Grimm's Myths?', in T. Shippey (ed.), *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous* (Turnhout, 2005), 29–82; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole'; Hafstein, 'Groaning Dwarfs'; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole'; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances', in J. Denzin and K. Wolf (ed.), *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke* (Ithaca, 2008), 183–206; W. Schäfer, 'Was ist eigentlich ein Zwerg? Eine prototypensemantische Figurenanalyse der *dvergar* in der Sagaliteratur', *Mediaevistik* 23 (2010), 197–299.

4 Probably a scribal error for *Martinianus*.

5 MS *inspiden*, a long-standing crux, is probably a corruption resulting from the scribe having written a 'p' rather than a 'p' (the letter called 'wynn', transcribed as 'w' in the edited text above); alternatively, scholars may have misread 'p' as 'p'. The proposed *-swiden* is cognate with ON *sviðin*, past participle of *sviða* 'to singe, roast, smart, burn', as observed in B. R. Hutcheson, 'Wið Dweorh: An Anglo-Saxon

Cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære.
 Legde þe his teage an sweoran.
 Ongunnan him of þæm lande liþan.
 Sona swa hy of þæm lande coman,
 þa ongunnan him ða liþu colian.
 Þa com ingangan deores⁶ sweostar.
 Þa geændade heo and aðas swor
 ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian⁷ ne moste,
 ne þæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,
 oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe.
 Amen. Fiað.⁸

+⁹ Against a dwarf/fever: one must take seven little sacramental wafers such as one makes offertory with, and write these names on each wafer: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus,

Remedy for Fever in its Cultural and Manuscript Setting', *AbäG* 69 (2012), 175–202 at 186.

- 6 The manuscript reading *deores* 'of the beast' makes sense, and even though the resulting line lacks alliteration, this need not necessarily indicate corruption as the whole incantation is, at least by the standards of 'classical' Old English verse, metrically irregular. The word is emended [*ea*]res in J. H. G. Grattan and C. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga'* (London, 1952), 162–3, the unattested **Ear* being explained as 'a divine name connected with the brightness of the morning sky'; in their view, *Ear*'s sister is *Eastre*, goddess of dawn. Hutcheson, 'Wið *Dweorh*' defends the same emendation. It remains an intriguing possibility, which the present interpretation might easily be adapted to accommodate, but when sisters appear in other fever-charms it is as fever-demons, such as the seven fever-sisters of the eleventh-century 'Sigismund Fever Charm'; see F. Wallis (ed.), *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto, 2010), 69; cf. also the maidens of Hell who deal out night-shivers to a man in *Sólarljóð* 38. Furthermore, female disease-demons swear not to harm those who know a particular charm in other texts; see Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, II, 195. If alliteration is deemed necessary, an alternative emendation of *deores* would be **indeores* 'of the inward-beast', assuming haplography after *ingangan*. This emendation would strengthen the parallel with *ingangan* *ins[w]iden* in line 1. Although **indeor* is not attested in surviving Old English records, it would not only make sense in context—assuming the 'beast' resided inside the sufferer—but also be comparable to other Old English words for internal afflictions: *inadl* 'internal disease', *incoðu* 'internal disease', *ingeswel* 'internal swelling', *instice* 'internal stabbing pair', *inwund* 'inward wound' and *inwyrm* 'internal worm'.
- 7 If alliteration is deemed necessary, *derian* might be emended to the synonymous *eglian* on the assumption that a scribe replaced a rarer verb with a commoner one.
- 8 Adapted from Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, I, 72, 74, the second volume of which summarizes prior interpretations of the charm, none of which are, in my view, satisfactory.
- 9 This symbol contributes to the charm's Christian potency. It may indicate that the practitioner should make the sign of the Cross when performing the cure.

Serafion.¹⁰ Then afterwards one must sing the incantation that is related hereafter, first into the left ear, then into the right ear, then above the crown of the person's head; and then let a virgin go to him and hang it on his neck, and let it be done so for three days; he will soon be better.

'Here came walking in an internally [or perhaps "inherently"/"very"] singed creature. It had its hame in its hands, said that you were its horse. It laid its ties on your neck. They began to journey from the land. As soon as they came from the land, then the limbs began to cool. Then came walking in the beast's [*deores*] sister. Then she interceded and swore oaths that this [i.e., this *deor* 'beast' or fever] might never harm the sick person, nor the one who could obtain this incantation or who knew how to recite this incantation. Amen. Let it be so.'

I propose that the first four lines of the incantatory section, which the healer recites into the patient's ears and above the crown of his or her head, address a fever-causing dwarf-beast which has entered the patient's skull.¹¹ The incantation evokes a remedial precedent in which a singed *wiht* entered, identified the dwarf-beast as its 'horse', and laid on its neck a hame with attached cords,¹² possibly with some difficulty.¹³ It then journeyed from the land with the dwarf-beast implicitly drawing a solar cart or chariot, whereupon the feverish limbs of the patient, whom they had left behind, began to cool.¹⁴ At that point, the sister of the

10 These are the names of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

11 If my interpretation is correct, the healer's pinpointing and expulsion of the disease-demon find broad parallel in the *Canterbury Runic Charm's* command *far þú nú, fundinn ertu* 'go now, you are found!' (see Chapter 9).

12 *OED* s.v. *hame*² a.: 'Each of two curved pieces of wood or metal placed over, fastened to, or forming, the collar of a draught horse.' Assuming this interpretation is correct, it is the only surviving instance of this word in Old English. *DOE* s.v. *hama* does not commit to a definition of this instance, but given the explicitly equine context, the meaning 'hame' is surely to be preferred to the main alternative, namely '(disguising) covering', 'skin'. The precise nature of the attached *teage* 'ties' is uncertain, but they may well be 'traces' attached to the draught-horse's collar (see *OED* s.v. *trace* n.² 1); a completely different meaning of OE *teag*, 'case', 'chest' seems less applicable.

13 Irish English has an expression 'to make a hames of (something)', which means 'to make a mess of (something)', 'possibly because it is difficult to put the hames on a horse the right way up'; T. P. Dolan, *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English: The Irish Use of English* (Dublin, 1998), s.v. *hames*. Cf. *OED* s.v. *hame*² a., quotation for 1883.

14 By contrast, many scholars—among them, Battles, 'Dwarfs', 35—interpret the *wiht* as the affliction-causing dwarf who mounts the patient (its 'horse') in the manner of a nightmare-monster. But the creature's hame indicates use of the 'horse' as a draught-animal, not a mount.

dwarf-beast appeared and declared the incantation's perennial efficacy for those who possessed it and knew how to recite it.¹⁵

Comparably to the intention of the thief in *Riddle 29*, the dwarf-beast is imagined, I think, to have concealed sunlight within a form of stronghold. In the riddle, the thief and the sunshine are implicitly separate at first, but become one when the thief places the radiant plunder between its horns on its way home, before being separated again. In the charm, the agent responsible for the concealment and the removed sunshine appear consubstantial throughout (see below) and the stronghold is identifiable as the skull of the patient, who suffered from a night-fever because of the heat from the internalized sunlight.¹⁶

The charm's singed *wiht* who harnessed the dwarf-beast as a draught-horse is, I propose, a sun-deity or solar emissary comparable to the solar *wiht* of *Riddle 29*.¹⁷ After attaching the dwarf-beast to a cart or chariot, the presence of which may be inferred from the use of a hame, the *wiht* journeyed 'from the land'—that is, the sun-god or solar emissary ascended into the sky, possibly over the cooling waters of the sea.¹⁸ With the removal of the internalized heat, and the concomitant

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- 15 If the sister is herself a dwarf, her healing function is echoed by the remedial powers of later dwarves of medieval romance, for which, see Battles, 'Dwarfs'; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love'. Although the vast majority of dwarves mentioned in medieval texts are male, a few females appear in late medieval Norse sagas. In addition, Queen Virginal, a character in the German story of *Virginal* (written sometime after 1260), was probably originally a dwarf-queen, as noted by Battles, 'Dwarfs', 60. For discussion, see A. Liberman, 'What Happened to Female Dwarfs?', in R. Simek and W. Heizmann (ed.), *Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz 1922–1997* (Vienna, 2002), 257–63; Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Hole', 68–9; U. Mikučionis, 'The Family Life of the Dwarfs and its Significance for Relationships between Dwarfs and Humans in the Sagas', *Maal og Minne* 2 (2014), 155–91 at 165–70.
- 16 In other Old English poems the mind is imagined as a container for treasures, typically reified thoughts and knowledge (illumination, enlightenment); see B. Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry', *ASE* 35 (2006), 57–90; B. Mize, 'Manipulations of the Mind-as-Container Motif in *Beowulf*, *Homiletic Fragment II*, and Alfred's *Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care*', *JEGP* 107 (2008), 25–56; B. Mize, 'The Mental Container and the Cross of Christ: Revelation and Community in *The Dream of the Rood*', *SP* 107 (2010), 131–78. For a later association between the moon—with which this dwarf may well be connected—and the human mind, see M. Williams, *Fiery Shapes: Celestial Portents and Astrology in Ireland and Wales, 700–1700* (Oxford, 2010), 175–6.
- 17 Cf. the implicitly charred blackness of the Old Norse fire-giant *Surtr* 'Black One', who wields a fiery, solar sword; also *Song of Songs* 1:6.
- 18 OE *liðan* often describes journeys over the sea (*OED* s.v. *lithe* v.1). A pun on *liðan* 'to assuage' is conceivable. Cf. the journey of Ing's wain over waves (probably) in the *Old English Rune Poem*.

strengthening of the external sun, the patient's fever subsided. Fevers are often severest at night, and lessen when morning comes.

An Old English Dwarf-Horse-Deer?

This interpretation immediately raises a question. Why should a sun-god or solar emissary call the offending dwarf his *hæncgest* '(male) horse',¹⁹ by which, judging from the reference to the hame, is meant specifically a draught-horse?²⁰

That the sun-god's carriage should have been drawn by a horse is not in itself surprising. Mythology offers many instances of this concept, some of which we noted in Chapter 6. They include the horse which draws the Trundholm chariot, the steeds which drew the golden chariot of Helios in Greek myth, and the equines of 2 *Kings* 23.11, to give but three examples.²¹ As the charm's sun-god may travel over the cooling sea, the present 'horse' might also suggest a solar barque, a concept now best known from Egyptian mythology but also attested in prehistoric Scandinavian rock-art (which shows horse-headed solar ships), early Celtic coins, Greek and Indian myth²²—and, I shall propose in my conclusion, on some Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Norse sword-pommels. OE *hengest* elsewhere appears in poetic compounds for 'ship', such as *brimhengest* and *farophhengest* 'sea-horse'.

But can a dwarf be a horse? After all, the Old English dwarf presumably, like its Old Norse counterpart, had a man-like aspect: *Völuspá* 10 appears to call dwarves *manlíkun* 'man-likenesses'. As surprising as it may sound, as we shall shortly see, there does exist the distinct possibility of identification with a horse or similar quadruped.

19 DOE s.v. *hengest*.

20 OE *hengest* also refers to a draught-horse, possibly in the compound *fæthengest*, in Old English *Riddle* 22 (*ASPR*) in what is probably a celestial context describing the movement of the wagon of Ursa Major, which is not, however, drawn by that horse.

21 See further West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 203–7.

22 See West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 207–9; D. N. Briggs, 'Reading the Images on Iron-Age Coins: 1. The Sun-Boat and its Passengers', *Chris Rudd List* 104 (2009), 2–4; Kristiansen, 'Rock Art', 100; Meller, *Der geschmiedete Himmel*, 58–63; Panchenko, 'Scandinavian Background'; Lahelma, 'Circumpolar Context'. However, the sun simply *veðr* 'wades' to her bed in a tenth- or eleventh-century skaldic verse by the Icelander Skúli Þorsteinsson, for which see *PTP*, 367–8 (translates 'strides'); *SnESkald*, I, 39.

If the dwarf somehow resembled both man and horse, this would not be wholly extraordinary, as we have evidence for other fantastic composite creatures in northern mythology.²³ One we have already met is the centaur-like *finngálkn*. Vargeisa, it will be recalled, had a horse's tail, hooves and mane, an elephant's trunk and a human's hands.²⁴ Hjálmpér had to jump on her shoulders, effectively mounting her (like a horse?), in order to obtain the radiant sword Snarvendill, which had been made by dwarves. Additionally, a carving on the right side of the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon Franks Casket shows a creature with an animal's head, a bird's winged body, a human's hands, and a horse's legs and hooves presenting a warrior with a branch.²⁵

More importantly, among the dwarves—described as *ásmegir* 'sons of the gods'—who built the centre of the stronghold containing the sun-bright Menglǫð in *Svipdagsmál* was *Vegdrasill* 'Road/Glory Steed' (*Fjolsvinnsmál* 34).²⁶ Another text, mentioned in Chapter 8 for its inclusion of an analogue to Grendel's mother, also strongly implies an identity between a dwarf and a draught-beast, in an episode which may reflect a myth in which a lunar dwarf stole sunlight.

Samsons saga fagra records how the thief Kvintalin forced a dwarf called Grelant/Grelent to capture Valentina, Samson's future wife.²⁷ The dwarf did so by building with wonderful skill a *gulllega kerru* 'golden cart' which *mætti leiða ... eftir sér* 'he could draw behind himself' *a hiolum* 'on wheels';²⁸ it contained food and a bed, and when Valentina stepped into it she suddenly fell asleep. Here, a crafty dwarf acts as both man-like creature—he converses with Kvintalin and demonstrates remarkable

23 See more generally S. Kristoffersen, 'Half Beast—Half Man: Hybrid Figures in Animal Art', *World Archaeology* 42 (2010), 261–72.

24 She also appears later in the saga as a vulture with iron beak and iron claws.

25 Perhaps a prototype 'twig-sword', or, indeed, a relative of the *gambanteinn*.

26 Gould, 'Dwarf-Names', 954. For ON *vegr* 'glory, honour', which might relate to MHG *wehen* 'to flash, radiate', see *ANEW* s.v. *vegr* 1; *ÍO* s.v. *vegur* 2. The same stanza might identify another of the dwarf-builders as *Liðskjálfr*, a name interpretable as, among other things, 'Joint/Limb Shake(r)' with reference to a dwarf that causes or has a shivery or convulsive fever. This reading, however, is doubtful and emended away by Robinson, 'Edition', 79, 133–4; so, too, in the same context, is a possible reference to (a dwarf called?) *Loki*, otherwise the name of a god who famously took the form of a horse on one occasion.

27 The dwarf's name meaning 'Hailing', in French at least. It is similar to *Garlant*, the name of Valentina's father.

28 Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Riddarasögur*, III, 368–9; J. Wilson (ed.), *Samsons saga fagra* (Copenhagen, 1953), 22.

skill as an artificer—and draught-beast. That the cart he builds and draws is golden raises the possibility that it originated as a carriage akin to the gilded Trundholm solar chariot.²⁹ Grelant's cart conceals the sleeping (solar?) love of Samson the Fair,³⁰ a hero whose name and appellation suggest an underlying solar aspect. Another feature of the story may also suggest a veiled solar dimension to Valentina's abduction and recovery. During this episode Samson sees a swift stag with antlers of sunlike radiance (see Chapter 10 above), to which he gives chase, but which he fails to catch due to traps set by Kvintalin and Galinn. That the stag was actually Grelant, or was conjured by him, seems implied by the appearance on the scene of the dwarf and his golden cart, and the swift disappearance thereafter of both stag and dwarf. Shortly afterwards, a small boy arrived on a small donkey and proceeded to deceive Samson further. The boy claimed the dwarf was his master, but again there is a distinct possibility that he was a shape-shifted Grelant.

Grelant's likely manifestations as both draught-horse and stag in a context suggestive of solar myth are especially interesting because the Old English charm's dwarf may not have just had an equine aspect but also a cervine one. The charm identifies its dwarf first as a (draught)-horse, but subsequently refers to the *deores sweostar* 'beast's sister', in which case the dwarf was presumably a *deor*.

OE *deor* 'beast' is the ancestor of modern English 'deer', but although the specialized cervine sense seems to have developed only in Middle English, the Old English word was typically used of savage animals or game³¹—a category that excludes draught-horses. There are, furthermore, two instances of the Old English word's use to describe deer. One is in the passage from the *Prose Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn* quoted in Chapter 10. The other describes reindeer in a passage from the Old English *Orosius*.³²

A key reason for proposing that the Old English dwarf may have had a cervine nature is the implicit equation of dwarves and deer in

29 It has been suggested that the cart was borrowed from Chretien de Troyes' *Lancelot*, in which a dwarf drives a cart containing Lancelot (Waggoner, *Sagas of Imagination*, 429 n. 14). However, that cart is not golden and the dwarf does not draw it.

30 For traditions of the sun's going to bed and resting, see West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 211. When he thinks Valentina is dead, Samson is betrothed to a certain *Ingina* (or *Ingiam*)—cf. the *Ingunn* or *Ingunar* of ON *Ingunar-Freyr*?

31 See DOE s.v. *deor*.

32 J. Bately (ed.), *The Old English Orosius*, EETS s.s. 6 (London, 1980), 15.

related Old Norse mythology. I reserve full details of this equation for the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that certain dwarves share their names with mythological stags. What is more, the Old Norse dwarves in question included a famous one, *Dvalinn* ‘One Who Had Delayed’ or ‘Torpid One’,³³ who stole the sun and played with it too long, to his undoing. We shall find that *Dvalinn* is associated with the moon, quite possibly as a personification of a moon which dwelt too long in the sky and, like the lunar *wiht* of *Riddle 29*, was overcome by the rising sun.

Another important point in this regard is that, as noted earlier, stags apparently drew the solar chariot in early Scandinavia.³⁴ We may also recall how Saxo describes Hotherus travelling in a cart drawn by harnessed reindeer on his quest for a marvellous sword (quite possibly solar), which he obtained from the nocturnal (quite possibly lunar) satyr *Mimingus*, probably from the concealment of his shadowy cave.

Also noteworthy, although it does not relate to dwarves, is an eye-catching compound noun found in the opening two lines of the fifth stanza of the *Codex Regius* text of *Völuspá*, which describe the world’s first dawn:

‘Sól varp sunnan, sinni mána,
hendi inni hægri um himinjóðýr’

‘Sun, companion of Moon, cast from the south her right hand over the sky-horse-deer’

The triple-compound *himinjóðýr* (*himinn* + *jór* + *dýr*) ‘sky-horse-deer’, which could be singular or plural, appears only here—instead of *um himinjóðýr*, the *Hauksbók* text has the metrically deficient *of jøður* ‘over the rim’. Quite possibly the original reading was *um himinjøður* ‘over the sky-rim’ (i.e., horizon), but if the reading of the *Codex Regius* is entertained, one or more ‘sky-horse-deer’ apparently belonging to the sun would parallel the Old English charm’s draught-horse-*deor* (ON *dýr* is cognate with OE *deor*).

33 On this name, see my subsequent remarks; also Gould, ‘Dwarf-Names’, 944; *PTP*, 695–6.

34 See also Dubois, ‘Mythic Sun’, 206–7 on the nurturing relationship of the sun to reindeer in Sámi tradition.

Here we should also note the blurred distinction between horses and horned beasts, especially stags, more widely in early European thought. Horned horses are a well-known mythological phenomenon, the most famous being the unicorn, which, according to Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (8.76), had a head resembling a stag and a body like a horse.³⁵ Others include the Pegasus depicted on a British coin of the 1st century B.C, and instances on Germanic bracteates of the Migration Age.³⁶ Older still, Bronze Age art from the Iberian Peninsula includes representations of hybrid stag-horses.³⁷ Additionally, medieval Celtic and German stories tell of marvellous persons riding stags as if they were horses, the most famous being the titular character of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* 'Life of Merlin' (c. 1150). Beneath a brightly shining horned moon, Merlin sat upon a stag, on which he rode forth when day dawned. Soon afterwards he killed a love-rival by tearing off his mount's antlers and hurling them at the man's head.³⁸

In turn, horned horses are not always mythical. There are rare instances of such aberrations in the historical record.³⁹ And even if such real 'horned' horses have only very small 'horns', the archaeological record indicates that, at various times and places, people have equipped real horses with horned head-gear, including antlers.⁴⁰

Humans, for their part, could for millennia similarly 'become' stags. Antler headdresses worn by people number among the Mesolithic finds from a site at Star Carr in North Yorkshire.⁴¹ The

35 Rackham, *Pliny: Natural History*, III, 56–7. For an explanation of this creature in relation to solar eclipses, see E. G. Suhr, 'An Interpretation of the Unicorn', *Folklore* 75 (1964), 91–109.

36 See M. Henig, 'A Coin of Tasciovanus', *Britannia* 5 (1974), 374–5 (and pl. 31).

37 See Gricourt and Hollard, *Cernunnos*, 122–3 and fig. 15.

38 B. Clarke (ed.), *Life of Merlin. Geoffrey of Monmouth: Vita Merlini* (Cardiff, 1973), 74–7, 140. Suhr, 'Maerchen', 282 claims that Merlin has 'marked features of the [lunar] shadow'. Cf. Frey's killing of Beli with an antler.

39 J. E. Miller, 'Horned Horses', *Journal of Heredity* 8 (1917), 303–5; K. Shuker, 'Horned Horses and Horses with Horns—Decidedly Different from Head to Toe(s)' (25 October 2013), <http://karlshuker.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/horned-horses-and-horses-with-horns.html>

40 See Henig, 'Coin', and 'Torrs Pony-Cap and Horns', in *Wikipedia* (17 February 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torrs_Pony-cap_and_Horns, which includes references to Iron Age graves in Siberia in which horses were equipped with antlered masks; also Gelling and Davidson, *Chariot*, pl. 6 (stone from Håggeby, Sweden).

41 See A. Little *et al.*, 'Technological Analysis of the World's Earliest Shamanic Costume: A Multi-Scalar, Experimental Study of a Red Deer Headdress from the Early Holocene

famous Late Palaeolithic cave painting of the ‘Sorcerer’ from Trois Frères in Ariège, France, shows a humanoid figure arguably equipped with a stag’s antlers. Much later, Anglo-Saxons could ‘become’ stags, which is an especially significant finding if the Old English charm’s feverish patient were internally possessed by a dwarf-horse-stag; penitential literature records that some Anglo-Saxons went about *in cervulo* ‘in (the form of) a stag’—presumably cavorting in deer-skins and antlers—during heathen rites at the Kalends of January.⁴² Also noteworthy is the bearing of reindeer antlers by participants in the annual Abbots Bromley Horn Dance in Staffordshire; at least one of these antlers dates from c. 1065, though it is unknown whether such a dance was performed anything like as early.⁴³ Even if it were not, the proposition that in pre-Conquest England a convulsive fever might have been attributed to possession by a bucking deer-spirit does not seem outlandish.⁴⁴

In view of all this evidence, I suggest (returning to the Old English charm) that, as night approached and the sun’s light faded, one of the sun-god’s radiant draught-horses may have turned into (or been possessed by) its dwarven alter ego, quite possibly through lunar agency. It had absconded (or been stolen) and concealed itself (or been hidden) inside the patient’s skull, thereby causing a convulsive nocturnal fever. Just before dawn, the sun-god or a solar emissary had arrived and reclaimed the errant beast, whereupon the cure had been effected.

Site of Star Carr, North Yorkshire, UK’, *PLoS ONE* 11(4) (2016), 1–10, <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0152136&type=printable>; C. Conneller, ‘Becoming Deer. Corporeal Transformations at Star Carr’, *Archaeological Dialogues* 11 (2004), 37–56. See also on this general topic, M. Pasarić, ‘For the Love of Antlers: Heads on a Wall or Antlers on a Bride’, *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 21 (2018), 217–35.

42 L. E. Nicholson, ‘*Beowulf* and the Pagan Cult of the Stag’, *Studi medievali* 27 (1986), 637–69 at 667.

43 See M. Heaney, ‘New Evidence for the Abbots Bromley Hobby-Horse’, *Folk Music Journal* 5 (1987), 359–60 and references therein. For the transformation of humans into ‘hert and hind’ in a Middle English poem, see L. A. J. R. Houwen, ‘“Bremer Beres” and “Hende Hertes”: Appearance and Reality in *William of Palerne*’, in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (ed.), *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose* (Groningen, 1994), 223–38. See also Gelling and Davidson, *Chariot*, 172–4.

44 For other instances of men supposedly becoming deer, see T. R. Hersh, ‘The Deer as a Symbol’, *Rock Art Papers* 11 (1994), 145–56, <http://www.psychological-observations.com/two-approaches-to-understanding-psychology/via-reflection-on-the-world/the-sacred/sacred-plants-animals/70-deer-as-symbol>

The charm's Christianized prose introduction might offer a further clue to a celestial interpretation. The virgin's placing of what was presumably a collar made from the seven holy wafers around the patient's neck seems to echo and supplement both the *wiht's* imposition of a hame on the dwarf and the assurance of remedial efficacy made by the beast's sister. The three days over which the remedy must be performed might simply be a conventional period without special significance. Then again, they could correspond to the approximate length of the dark lunar phase, when the moon 'hides' from view.

Support for aspects of this interpretation may come from two little-known Old Norse texts concerning dwarves.

A Headache(?) - Causing Dwarf from Denmark

The first of these Old Norse texts is an eighth-century runic remedy inscribed on a fragment of the crown of a human skull found at Ribe, South Jutland.⁴⁵ Its interpretation is uncertain, but it too seems to offer grounds for identifying a dwarf as a disease-agent, one that causes headache, a common accompaniment to fever.

The Old Norse inscription begins by naming three figures, at least one of whom is a god: *Ulfur auk Óðinn auk Ho-tiur* 'Wolf (= Fenrir?) and Óðinn and High-Týr(?)'.⁴⁶ Next come the words *Hjalp buri es viðr þæima verki*, which may mean 'Búri/Buri is help against the pain' or 'There is help from *Burr* 'Son' [or 'the borer' (i.e., drill?)] against the pain'. Judging from the unusual choice of material for the inscription, the pain may have been a headache. The pain seems to have been attributed to a dwarf, as the next words are *Auk dverg [= dvergr?] unninn Bóurr* 'And a/the dwarf (is) overcome, Bóurr'.

Buri/Búri is elsewhere attested both as the name of Óðinn's grandfather and the name of a dwarf. Whether *Bóurr* is the name of a/the dwarf, the patient or the rune-carver (or someone else) is uncertain, but it looks as though it might be akin to *Bívorr* and *Bávorr*, two dwarf-names listed immediately after *Alþjófr* 'All-Thief' and *Dvalinn* '(One

45 McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 50–1; MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, 25–7; E. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen, 1985), 151–3, 346.

46 I quote from the standardized transcription in McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, *Runes*, 50.

Who Had) Delayed' in a list of dwarf-names in *Völuspá* 11. *Bívǫrr* and *Bávǫrr*, at least the first of which possibly means 'Shaker' (cf. ON *bifast* 'to shake'),⁴⁷ perhaps allude to feverish shivering? As noted earlier, and we shall see in more detail later, Dvalinn played too long with sunlight, which he had probably stolen.

The possibility of a correspondence between this Old Norse charm and the proposed theme of the poetic section of the Old English charm *Wið dweorh*—which, comparably, is recited above the crown of a patient's skull—is tantalizing. In the Norse inscription, we may have one supernatural personage, *Búri/Buri*, boring *in* to remedy a feverish headache caused by a dwarf (*Búri's* relative?) called *Bóurr*.⁴⁸ If so, we may compare, in the Old English charm, the *ingangan* 'in-going' of the remedial *wiht*, whose work is completed by the similarly 'in-going' sister of the afflicting dwarf. If my interpretation of the Old English text is broadly correct, the afflicting dwarf had earlier itself 'gone into' the patient's skull.

A hole in the Ribe skull-fragment might indicate trepanation, the hole then being the opening through which the afflicting dwarf escaped, or was extracted, from the patient's head. A more mundane explanation, however, is that this hole, which was apparently drilled from the inside, was simply intended for a suspension cord.⁴⁹

Another Headache-Causing Dwarf and a Radiant Sword

The second Old Norse text which may offer some support for my interpretation of *Wið dweorh* (and aspects of *Beowulf*) is much later, but far easier to understand. The fourteenth-century Icelandic *Sigurðar saga þogla* 'Saga of Sigurðr the Silent' contains an episode which also

⁴⁷ PTP, 693–4. Cf. *Liðskjálfr* in n. 26 above.

⁴⁸ Since dwarves lived in rocks, they were naturally rock-borers, but note also the dwarves *Dolgpvari* 'Wound-Borer' and *Hornbori* 'Horn-Borer', though the latter name might alternatively mean 'Horn-Bearer'. If dwarves may be horses, the 'horse'-term or proper name *bolpvari* 'evil-borer' may be relevant; PTP, 711–2, 937–8. Giants, who similarly lived in rocks, were apparently also borers; in addition to *Gyrið sárþvara* (mentioned earlier), note the giant-name *Blappvari*; PTP, 711. Alternatively, *Bóurr* might be the name of a human.

⁴⁹ Moltke, *Runes*, 161, 347–9. On this text, see also Kveldulfr H. Gundarsson, *Elves, Wights, and Trolls: Studies Towards the Practice of Germanic Heathenry: Volume I* (New York, 2007), 88.

imagines a dwarf as a source of headache, in this case an explicitly night-time one.⁵⁰

It describes how *Hálfðan* 'Half-Dane', son of King Lodivikus of Saxland (Saxony), came one day to a brook that ran down from a mountain in a gully. Nearby he saw a large stone, almost like a house, and shortly afterwards a *duergsbarn* 'dwarf's child'.⁵¹ He threw a stone at the creature, breaking its jaw. Hálfðan reported this event to his brother, *Vilhjálmr* 'Welcome Helmet/Protector', who warned him that trolls and elves (clearly not distinct from dwarves here) are vengeful if crossed, but apt to reward good turns.

Sure enough, that night, as soon as Hálfðan fell asleep, he dreamt that a dwarf came to him, one bigger than that he had seen during the day. It was the dwarf-child's father, who proceeded to curse him. Also, before disappearing, *Duergrin laust med sprota .iij. hogg j hofud honum* 'The dwarf struck three blows on his [i.e., Hálfðan's] head with a sprout/stick', so that *er Hálfðan vaknade hafði hann fengit hofudverc suo strangann at honum þotti nær heilinn munde wt springa og matti hann ei ur reckiu risa þann dag* 'when Hálfðan awoke he had got such a severe headache that it seemed to him that the brain was on the point of bursting, and he could not rise from bed that day.'⁵²

In a sense, then, the dwarf-father caused Hálfðan's headache by *entering his head*, albeit only in a dream. Furthermore, headaches and bad dreams often accompany fevers. And if Hálfðan's nightmare and incapacitation were accompanied by tossing and turning, we could have a parallel to the convulsions associated with a dwarf in Old English.⁵³

No less interesting is the episode's continuation, in which Hálfðan's headache is cured and Vilhjálmr receives a remarkable gift.

The day after Hálfðan's nightmare, Vilhjálmr went to the spot where his brother had injured the dwarf-child. There he saw the same child, whom he gave a gold ring,⁵⁴ to the creature's delight. That night

50 A. Loth (ed.), *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, 5 vols (Copenhagen, 1962–5), II, 113–7. On this episode, see also Battles, 'Dwarfs', 44–6, 49; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enabling Love', 199–201.

51 Loth, *Late Medieval*, II, 114.

52 Loth, *Late Medieval*, II, 115.

53 Note also an instance of a dwarf (also described as a thief) who caused extreme illness in a troll-woman, apparently while she was lying in bed at night, in chapter 6 of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* 'The Saga of Þorsteinn, Son of Víkingr'; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 398.

54 A solar symbol?

Vilhjálmr dreamt that the dwarf-father came to him and thanked him for giving his child the ring. He said that his curse on Hálfðan must remain, but that the headache would get better. He also said he would give Vilhjálmr a sword unmatched for its sharpness, and that he would never be defeated in battle.

When Vilhjálmr awoke he discovered the sword at his bed's head. It *var suo gull j hiolltunum at birte af vm alla lyptingina og næliga þotti honum loga eggjar hans er hann braa honum* 'was so golden in the hilt that there was brightness over all the poop deck, and it seemed to him almost as if its edges blazed when he drew it.'⁵⁵ He called the sword *Gunnlogi* 'Battle-Flame', a name it bore henceforth.⁵⁶

As we saw earlier, the same name describes another sword, the *bjartr gunnlogi* 'bright battle-flame' of *Grettis saga*—a weapon which in turn parallels the golden-hilted, sun-like giant sword of *Beowulf*. Vilhjálmr's sword is arguably another manifestation of this special weapon. Its fiery radiance suggests that it may well be a solar weapon.⁵⁷ There is also a parallel with the Anglo-Saxon dwarf's implicit possession and relinquishing of sunlight in *Wið dweorh*.

Additionally, there are parallels to draw between Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr on the one hand, and Hroðgar, son of *Healfdene* (= ON *Hálfðan*) and *Beowulf*, Hroðgar's welcome, helmeted protector, on the other. Hroðgar, like Hálfðan, is effectively incapacitated by a monster—he broods on his sorrow and, in one scene, *sunu Healfdenes* 'Healfdene's son' conspicuously takes to his bed in anticipation of another attack (645–51).

55 Loth, *Late Medieval*, II, 116.

56 Loth, *Late Medieval*, II, 116–7. Later in the same saga (Loth, *Late Medieval*, II, 139–41) we learn of a sword with a golden hilt inlaid with shining jewels. It had been made by four northern dwarves for the King of Sicily, but *þetta suerd hafði stólit brutt þadann jotunn einn nordan ur Suafua er Faunus het* 'a certain giant from the north, from Swabia(?), who was called Faunus, had stolen this sword away from there.' With Faunus—a name indicative of a woodland creature, possibly horned—compare Saxo's satyr Mimingus, custodian of a remarkable (stolen?) sword (see Chapter 8). Later still in the saga (191–2), a dwarf standing outside his stone house gives a brightly radiant dark-red stone (originally part of the setting or dawning sun?) to the titular hero.

57 Given the various twig-swords encountered in this study, we may wonder whether the *sproti* with which the dwarf struck Hálfðan is identical, or at least akin, to the radiant sword he gives to Vilhjálmr. Also noteworthy in this episode is the father-dwarf's arrival after his child has been hurt, and his removal of the headache he had imposed. Cf., in the Old English charm, the sister's arrival after the remedial *wiht* has harnessed the *deor*, and her promise that anyone who knew how to obtain or recite the incantation would not be so harmed in future.

Also, although Vilhjálmr, unlike Beowulf (who received Healfdene's ornamented 'firebrand' as a reward for defeating Grendel), does not fight the afflicting creature, but rather gives its child a gold ring, he does similarly remedy the pain and acquires a radiant gold-hilted sword in the process. In *Beowulf*, the golden-hilted giant sword, wielded by the ring-mailed *hringa þengel* 'prince of rings' (1507), is described as having a *fetelhilt* 'ring/chain(?) -hilt' (1563) and being *hringmæl* 'ring-marked/embellished' (1564) when beheading Grendel's mother; thus, in a sense, Beowulf could be thought to have, in a sense, given a golden ring to a monster in return for a golden-hilted, blazing sword of light.⁵⁸

The Sun as Healer, Especially in Old English Remedies

Chapter 37 of *Vatnsdæla saga* also contains a potentially relevant episode concerning a cure for convulsive fits, albeit not feverish. A man afflicted by what he describes as unwanted occurrences of *berserksgangr* 'going berserk', but which are presumably epileptic fits, is cured by an appeal to *þann, er sólina hefir skapat* 'he who has created the sun', who was deemed the mightiest.⁵⁹

Additionally, Old English remedies strengthen the case for interpreting the remedying *wiht* of *Wið dweorh* as the sun or a solar emissary. Indeed, the sun's healing power is apparent elsewhere in *Lacnunga*.

Thus one *Lacnunga* remedy for a headache (not specifically feverish) requires the patient to lie face upward *wið hatre sunnan* 'toward the hot sun'.⁶⁰ Another remedy from the same collection, for toothache, prescribes words to be sung *syððan sunne beo on setle* 'after the sun is in its seat [i.e., has set]'.⁶¹ The sung words are partly corrupt, but probably include the statement '*ne æceð þæc ofer eall þonne alið; coliað þonne hit on eorðan hatost byrneð*' 'It will not ache for you immeasurably when it lies down [i.e.,

58 Perhaps also compare Skírnir's proposed gift of a marvellous ring to Gerðr. Although she is initially unimpressed by the offer, she might still have received the ring in exchange for agreeing to marry Freyr.

59 Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Vatnsdæla saga*, 97–8; G. Jones (trans.), *The Vatnsdalers' Saga* (Princeton, 1944), 98–9, 150–1.

60 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, I, 4–5.

61 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, I, 12–13; see also E. Pettit, 'Some Anglo-Saxon Charms', in J. Roberts and J. Nelson (ed.), *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy* (London, 2000), 411–33 at 418–32.

when the sun sets]; it will cool [i.e., the pain/inflammation will lessen] when it burns hottest on earth [i.e., tomorrow afternoon, when the sun is strongest].’ From the reference to cooling we may reasonably infer that the toothache-causing infection had led to inflammation or fever.

Elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon literature, an Old English penitential text records another sun-related remedy for fever:

Wif gif heo set hire dohtor ofer hus oððe on ofen forþam ðe heo wylle hig feferadle gehælan: fæste heo VII winter.⁶²

If a woman places her daughter above a house or in an oven because she wants to cure her of a feverish illness: she is to fast for seven years.

Presumably, the feverish daughter would be placed on the roof to be nearer the sun’s healing heat. The severity of the prescribed penance may attest to the practice’s heathen origin and tenacity. To this day, the popular belief persists that one should ‘sweat a fever’.

The Dwarf and Grendel as ‘In-Going’ Fever-Demons

We saw in Chapter 11 that the thieving lunar creature of *Riddle 29* finds parallel in Grendel in some key respects. So too, I believe, does the afflicting dwarf of *Wið ðweorh*, albeit less clearly.

If I have interpreted the Old English charm’s basis correctly, the absconding dwarf-horse-beast had entered, and secreted itself within, the head of a human. There its solar heat had caused a fever, which was attended by convulsions (possibly due to the invader bucking like a deer), of which the patient involuntarily partook.

Grendel—a potentially horned, even antlered creature—was similarly an *ingenga* ‘in-goer’, ‘invader’ (1776), a noun found only here.⁶³ He had broken through the *mupan* ‘mouth’ (724) of the stag-hall Heorot and thereby implicitly entered its head. There, by night, he took up ruling residence (*rixode* ‘he ruled’, 144; *Heorot eardode* ‘he

62 F. Grendon, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Charms’, *JAF* 22 (1909), 105–237 at 142; Pettit, ‘Some Anglo-Saxon Charms’, 431.

63 Dronke, ‘Beowulf’, 305 says that ‘the simplicity of the word is striking in the context’. Note also that Grendel’s mother, who is suggestive of a convulsive mare-monster (see Chapter 8), attempted to gain *ingang* ‘in-going’, ‘entry’ (1549) to Beowulf’s prostrate body with her seax.

inhabited Heorot', 166; *goldsele Grendel warode* 'Grendel occupied the gold-hall', 1253), and later, when wrestling with Beowulf, convulsed its interior (767–82, 997–1000). As a result of Grendel's attacks, Hroðgar, who as 'shelter of the Ing-Friends' is implicitly identified with Heorot, suffered mental anguish. In his words, after a hundred seasons of secure rule:

'... me þæs on eple edwenden cwom,
gyrn æfter gomene, seoþðan Grendel wearð,
ealdgewinna, ingenga min;
ic þære socne singales wæg
modceare micle.' (1774–8)

'... of this there came to me in my native land a reversal, affliction after amusement, when Grendel, the old adversary, became my in-goer; from that visitation I continually bore great mind-care/anxiety [or "I continually bore the great mind-care of that visitation"].'

Following Hroðgar's prominent references to the prospect of *adl* 'disease' shortly earlier in the same speech (1736, 1763), we might also hear a pun on *seocnes* 'sickness' in *socne singales*.⁶⁴ Whether that possibility is accepted or not, there are strong reasons for thinking that Grendel is imagined partly as a demon of disease (see also Chapter 1). He appears early in the poem as a *wiht unhælo* 'creature of unwholesomeness/unhealthiness' (120).⁶⁵ His sickness, and that which he implicitly inflicts, was in some sense feverish. For Grendel was a demon whose eyes, which gleamed with a hideous light *ligge gelicost* 'most like fire', suggest a fierce internal heat—a gleam mentioned at the very moment he entered Heorot (724–7), a hall destined ultimately to be consumed by

64 On Grendel as a disease-spirit, see also G. Hübener, 'Beowulf's "Seax," the Saxons and an Indian Exorcism', *RES* 12 (1936), 429–39; Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 77–87. In similarly arguing that Grendel is a disease-spirit who 'takes up residence in the body [of Heorot]', Anderson refers to other Old English charms, but overlooks *Wið dweorh*.

65 Cf. the feminine noun *hæl* 'health, happiness, sound physical condition', and the adjectives *hal* and *hæl* 'hale, whole'; note the sly joke anticipating Grendel's future state, as he will be literally 'un-whole' when he loses an arm. Also pertinent is the neuter noun *hæl* 'omen'; see my discussion of the *Liber monstrorum* in Chapter 14. In addition, Grendel's status as a *þyrs* 'giant, demon' may be noted, as this word's Old Norse cognate, *þurs*, denotes a type of health-afflicting creature in some contexts; see Chapter 9 and Frog, 'The (De)Construction of Mythic Ethnography I: Is Every *þurs* in Verse a *þurs*?', *RMN Newsletter* 6 (2013), 52–72.

flames. I think it no coincidence that earlier, when addressing the Danish coastguard, Beowulf had implicitly identified himself as the means by which Hroðgar could effect an overpowering *bot* ‘remedy’ which would cause the *cearwylmas* ‘boiling anxieties’, caused by Grendel in Heorot, to become *colran* ‘cooler’:⁶⁶

‘Ic þæs Hroðgar mæg
 þurh rumne sefan ræd gelæran,
 hu he, frod ond god, feond oferswyðeþ —
 gyf him edwenden æfre scolde,
 bealuwa bisigu bot eft cuman —
 ond þa ceawylmas colran wurðap;
 oððe a syþðan earfoðþrage,
 þreanyd þolað þenden þær wunað
 on heahstede husa selest.’ (277–85)

‘I can give Hroðgar advice about this through a roomy heart [i.e., with generosity], how he, old/wise and good, may overpower the enemy—if for him a reversal, a remedy for the baleful attacks of affliction, should ever come about in turn—and those boiling anxieties become cooler; otherwise, always thereafter he will suffer a torment-time, throe-necessity as long as the best of houses dwells there in its high place.’

From this passage it appears that Grendel was, from one perspective, a nocturnal fever-demon, like the dwarf of *Wið dweorh*. This interpretation is strengthened by the likelihood that, as Michael Lapidge has observed,⁶⁷ Grendel may be readily categorized as a *nihtgenga* ‘night-goer/walker’. Although this word does not appear in *Beowulf*, it would suit Grendel perfectly, as he was not only an *ingenga* but also a nocturnal *angeng(e)* a ‘lone-walker’ (165, 449) who, as a *sceadugenga* ‘shadow-walker’ (703), *com ... gongan* ‘came walking’ (710–11). As Lapidge also notes, *nihtgenga* appears in several Old English remedies. The content and context of these shows, or strongly suggests, that they are for headache, fever or another affliction of the head or mind.

One such cure, for a very old headache, from the Old English *Leechbook III*, requires that little stones from the maw of young swallows be placed on the sufferer. It claims that *hi beoþ gode wip heafodece ond*

⁶⁶ Cf. Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 78. Note also *Beowulf* 2066.

⁶⁷ Lapidge, ‘*Beowulf* and the Psychology’, 390–2.

wiþ eagwærce ond wiþ feondes costunga ond nihtgengan ond lenctenadle ond maran ond wyrtforbore ond malscra ond yflum gealdorcræftum ‘they are good for headache and for eye-pain and for temptations of the enemy [i.e., Devil] and night-walkers and spring-sickness [i.e., tertian malaria?] and (night)mares and herbal-induced restraint [i.e., constipation?] and enchantments and evil spell-crafts’.⁶⁸

A second remedy from *Leechbook III* against *nihtgengan* immediately precedes an alarming cure for a person whose *heafodpanne beo gehlenced* ‘skull is distorted(?)’.⁶⁹ One is to lay him face upwards, drive two stakes *æt þam eaxlum* ‘at the shoulders’, lay a plank across his feet, and then strike it three times with a sledgehammer—perhaps to expel an internalized demon.

A third remedy from *Leechbook III*, which follows remedies for ear-pain and precedes a cure for ‘elf-sickness’ (mentioned in Chapter 4), begins: *Wyrce sealfre wiþ ælfcynne ond nihtgengan ond þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð* ‘Make a salve against the elf-race and night-walkers and the people with whom the Devil has sexual intercourse’. It concludes:

Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan, smire his ondwlitan mid þisse sealfre ond on his eagan do ond þær him se lichoma sar sie, ond recelsa hine ond sena gelome. His þing biþ sona selre.⁷⁰

If any evil temptation or elf or night-walkers⁷¹ should befall [or ‘settle in’?] a man, smear his forehead with this salve, and put it on his eyes and where(ever) his body may be painful, and cense him with incense and make the sign of the Cross frequently. His condition will soon be better.

A fourth cure, the very first in the *Old English Herbarium*, asserts that betony *scyldeþ wið unhyrum nihtgengum and wið egeslicum gesihðum and swefnum* ‘shields against monstrous night-walkers and against terrible visions and dreams’.⁷² It is immediately followed by remedies that employ betony for a *heafod tobrocen* ‘broken head’ and for afflictions of

68 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 306.

69 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 342.

70 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, II, 344.

71 The use of the plural noun with the singular verb *weorþe* may indicate that *nihtgengan* is an afterthought or that it was originally a gloss to *ælf* which subsequently became incorporated into the main text.

72 H. J. de Vriend (ed.), *The Old English Herbarium and Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, EETS o.s. 286 (Oxford, 1984), 30 (see also 1).

the eye, ear, nose and teeth—head problems. Here *nihtgengum* translates the Latin text's *nocturnas ambulationes* 'nocturnal walkings (about)'.⁷³

The first of the aforementioned cures suggests that night-walkers may have been associated with spring fever (possibly tertian malaria) and the Devil's temptations. The nature of these (sexual?) temptations is unspecified, but they call to mind the *wom wundorbebodum / wergan gastes* 'crooked/perverse wonder-biddings of the accursed spirit' which, in *Beowulf*, pierce the sleeping soul and are equated with the piercing shaft of a slayer suggestive of Grendel (1741–7). We may be justified in relating this shaft to the folkloric concept of 'elf-shot',⁷⁴ since the third remedy from *Leechbook III* cited above pairs the night-walker with the elf-race, a group of beings which *Beowulf* numbers among Grendel's kin: *eotenas ond ylfe* 'giants and elves' (112).

Intriguing, too, is the possibility that the immediate context of the second and fourth of the cited remedies associates nightwalkers with the most serious of physical head injuries, namely those involving broken bones. This could tie in with Grendel's wrecking of Heorot.

In conclusion, I suggest that, rather as a nocturnal dwarf-horse-beast seems to have brought hot sunlight within the cranium of a human, who then convulsed with fever (like a bucking deer?), so the fiery disease-demon Grendel brought feverish cares inside, and wracked, the head of the stag-hall and concomitantly that of its lord.⁷⁵ By extension, *Beowulf*, whom Hroðgar considers the emissary of *halig God* 'holy God' (381–2), played the part of the remedial solar *wiht* on behalf of the representative or incarnation of the sun-god Ing. In other words, *Beowulf*, who along with his men wore *scir* 'bright' armour that *scan* 'shone' (321–2, 405,

73 Although, as noted by A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge, 2007), 127, it is not clear quite what is meant by OE *nihtgenga*, I see something of the somnambulist, the prototypical undead zombie, in Grendel. He is a nocturnal walker who comes from a mere identified with Hell, and is therefore in some sense dead, but also stalks the earth alive; he is at once bound by the metaphorical deathly sleep of sinfulness and yet blazingly awake—until, that is, his final sleep upon his deathbed.

74 Generally on Anglo-Saxon elves and elf-shot, see Hall, *Elves*.

75 As a nocturnal demon from polluted swampland (like the devils who tormented Guðlac in the marshes of Crowland), Grendel was conceivably once a bringer of malaria, an often fatal disease that causes fever, delirium and convulsions. Malaria's presence in Anglo-Saxon England has not been proven, but the disease is thought likely to have been endemic; see M. Ziegler, 'Mapping Malaria in Anglo-Saxon England' (5 February 2012), <https://contagions.wordpress.com/2012/02/05/mapping-malaria-in-anglo-saxon-england>

1895), effects for the 'Bright-Danes' the *beorhtre bote* 'bright remedy/compensation' (158) which, the poet had earlier observed, would not be forthcoming from Grendel, the *deorc deapscua* 'dark death-shadow' (160). That Beowulf brings a 'remedy' to Hroðgar and Heorot is underlined later when the king, gazing upon Grendel's severed arm, thanks the Almighty for the *bote* (934) of which he had recently despaired.

In the next chapter I return to the Old Norse poem *Sólarljóð* for a detailed interpretation of two stanzas that seem to me likely to relate a myth similar to those found in *Riddle 29* and *Wið dweorh*. It too concerns the recovery of sunlight, this time symbolized by a hart's horn. In the process, I will present further Old Norse evidence identifying dwarves with stags, the moon, giants and the theft of sunlight. This evidence will bolster my interpretation of *Wið dweorh*. More importantly, it will increase the likelihood that myths of sun and moon may explain, from a native Germanic perspective, the giants' possession of the probably sun-like giant sword in *Beowulf* and that weapon's recovery and presentation to Hroðgar.

13. The Solar Antler in *Sólarljóð*

In light of my findings so far concerning mythological traditions about solar stags, the relationship between antlers and swords, and the theft and recovery of sunlight, two stanzas from near the end of *Sólarljóð* merit analysis. At least the first of these stanzas concerns a buried, probably solar antler. In my view, both stanzas concern this antler and preserve, or reinvent, a heathen myth about a dwarf's illicit storage of a rune-inscribed weapon originally symbolic of sunshine, which was later liberated by solar emissaries.¹ I believe this myth bears comparison to Beowulf's taking of the rune-inscribed hilt of the giant sword from Grendel's mere.

Stanzas 78 and 79 of *Sólarljóð* read:

‘Arfi, faðir einn ek ráðit hefi,
ok þeir Sólkötlu synir,
hjartarhorn, þat er ór haugi bar
inn vitri Vígdvalinn [or Vig(g)dvalinn].

‘Her eru þær rúnir, sem ristit hafa
Njarðar dætr níu,
Böðveig [or Baugveig] in elzta ok Kreppvör in yngsta
ok þeira systur sjau.’²

‘Heir, I alone, (your) father, and the sons of *Sólkatla* “Sun-Cauldron” have read the hart’s horn, that which the wise Vígdvalinn bore from the burial mound.

1 Tate, “‘*Heiðar stjörnur*’”, 1032–3 denies that the antler is inscribed with runes, but overstates the case that the poet simply sought to overturn heathen tradition. As Amory, ‘Norse-Christian Syncretism’, I, 8–9 observes, for example, in stanza 25 the poet elevates the heathen women called *dísir* to the ranks of the holy.

2 Adapted from Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 352, 354.

'Here are those runes which Njörðr's nine daughters have carved, *Böðveig* "Battle-Drink" [or *Baugveig* 'Ring-Drink'] (being) the eldest (daughter) and *Kreppvör* "Strait/Clench/Scrape(?)-Goddess" the youngest and their seven sisters.'

It has rightly been observed that '*Sólarljóð* is, to say the least, a difficult poem',³ whose 'poetic interpretation of pagan myths as Christian symbols ... is ... idiosyncratic'.⁴ These two stanzas contribute to that difficulty, especially as only one of the proper names they mention is otherwise known. To interpret these stanzas, we must first set them in context. This is not a straightforward task, but an attempted summary of the poem follows.

Sólarljóð is a visionary poem spoken by a dead Christian man to his son, the vision being communicated in a dream. The father begins by telling a series of moral *exempla*, the first and longest concerning robbery and murder, and including personages with semi-allegorical names. Next comes a series of more formal counsels, followed by a description of the man's illness, death and vision of the sun as he passes from this world. After a period in which his soul apparently wavers between Heaven and Hell, he records what he witnessed in the Otherworld. He saw *fljúga vánardreka* 'a dragon of expectation flying' from the west (54), *sólar hjört* 'the sun's stag' (or 'a stag of the sun') journeying from the south (55),⁵ and seven *niðja sonu* 'sons of waning/dark moons' riding from the north (56).⁶ He goes on to describe the terrors and torments of those in Hell, interspersed with the happy fates of the virtuous in Heaven. It is in this section that stanzas 78 and 79 appear, sandwiched between a description of Óðinn's wife (Frigg or perhaps Freyja) rowing *á jarðar skipi* 'in/on the ship of the earth' as an image of the torment of unquenchable sexual desire (77), and a reference to the evils perpetrated by persons, creatures or objects called *Sváfr* and *Sváfrlogi* (78; see below). The father concludes by instructing his son to recite the poem to living people and by informing him that they will meet again *á feginsdegi fira* 'on men's day of joy' (i.e., Doomsday).

3 Tate, "*Heiðar stjörnur*", 1030.

4 Amory, 'Norse-Christian Syncretism', I, 17.

5 As on the south face of the Gosforth Cross (see Chapter 10).

6 Tate, "*Heiðar stjörnur*", 1030–1 relates these stanzas to descriptions in *Völuspá*.

Stanzas 78 and 79 contribute to the poem's visionary climax. This suggests that they hold great significance, and that, as one scholar has observed, the hart's horn 'is an object with deep symbolic import, perhaps representing the revelatory crux of the poem'.⁷ It also appears likely that these stanzas, like others in the poem, draw on both Christian and heathen themes and images. More specifically, we may infer from the reference to the solar hart in stanza 55 that the *hjartarhorn* 'hart's horn' of stanza 78 is a solar symbol.

In my view, stanzas 78 and 79 accommodate both Christian and heathen interpretations. I examine their possible Christian significance first.⁸

The Buried Antler and Christian Legends, Especially of the Cross

In Christian tradition the stag often symbolizes Christ.⁹ St. Ambrose, for example, treated the stag as a 'type' of both the giant-killer David and Christ.¹⁰ The medieval *Icelandic Physiologus*, which is thought likely to derive from English models, directly equates a deer with Christ.¹¹

Since the medieval mind also identified Christ with the sun, the heathen image of the solar stag would have lent itself readily to reuse by Christians.¹² As *Sólárljóð* is fundamentally a Christian poem, the solar hart of stanza 55 probably symbolizes Christ.

If the solar stag represents Christ, there are reasons for thinking that its buried antler symbolizes the Cross, as others have proposed.¹³ The

7 Birkett, *Reading the Runes*, 173.

8 For other views about these enigmatic stanzas, including alternative Christian interpretations, see D. Brennecke, 'Zur Strophe 78 der *Sólárljóð*', *ANF* 100 (1985), 97–108; Njörður P. Njarðvík (ed.), *Sólárljóð* (Reykjavík, 1991), 102–6.

9 See Bampi, "'Göfuct dýr'".

10 Nicholson, '*Beowulf*', 639.

11 Waggoner, *Sagas of Imagination*, 112; V. D. Corazza, 'Crossing Paths in the Middle Ages: The *Physiologus* in Iceland', in M. Buzzoni and M. Bampi (ed.), *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts: Venice, October 28–30, 2004* (Venice, 2005), 225–48.

12 In this light, *Beowulf's* stag seeking the wood may anticipate the early thirteenth-century Middle English poem *Now goth sonne under wod*. In this poem *sonne* 'sun' and *some* 'son [i.e., Christ]' are implicitly equated; so is the *wod* 'wood' with *rode*, which denotes both the face (of Mary) and the Rood, and with *tre* 'tree, Cross'; Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics*, 54.

13 Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 335. Brennecke, 'Strophe 78' argues that the single horn of *Sólárljóð* 78 is that of a unicorn, symbolic of Christ. However, the

Cross was intimately linked with the sun in medieval symbolism. This is shown, for instance, by the image of *sio reade rod* 'the red Rood' that will shine on *þære sunnan gyld* 'in place of the sun' on Doomsday, according to the Old English poem *Christ* (1101–2).¹⁴ It is also apparent from the presence of solar imagery on the Gosforth Cross, including an antlered hart.

As we have seen, antler and Cross are juxtaposed—and thereby implicitly equated—in the illustration of David's palace in the *Utrecht Psalter* and *Harley Psalter*. A still more striking instance of implied equation by juxtaposition appears in the story of St. Eustace, which was popularized in the second half of the thirteenth century by its inclusion in the *Legenda Aurea* 'Golden Legend' of Jacobus de Voragine. This story was known in medieval Iceland: it forms the subject of both a poem, *Plácitusdrápa*, and a prose narrative, *Plácitus saga*.¹⁵ According to the story, Placidus (*Plácitus*), a righteous heathen Roman in the service of the Emperor Trajan, was out hunting one day when a huge stag appeared before him. The stag, which declared itself a manifestation of Christ, had a radiant crucifix between its antlers; in effect, the crucifix formed a third, central antler.¹⁶ The late Anglo-Saxon homilist Ælfric records that *betwux þæs heortes hornum glitenode gelicnys þære halgan cristes rode breohtrre þonne sunnan leoma* 'between the hart's horns glittered the likeness of the rood of holy Christ, brighter than the sun's light'.¹⁷ Placidus then returned home, converted to Christianity and changed his name to Eustachius (Eustace).

Earlier, classical authors including Pliny, Aelian, Oppian and Lucretius had reported that the stag was a serpent-slaying creature. This belief was picked up by medieval Christian authorities, such as Isidore of Seville. Images of Christ as stag and of stag as snake-killer

solar hart of *Sólarljóð* 55 has more than one horn (*tóku horn* is plural). Nor is the antlered solar hart of the Gosforth Cross a unicorn.

14 Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, I, 90.

15 See, respectively, Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 179–220 and J. Tucker (ed.), *Plácitus saga* (Copenhagen, 1998). On the story's background and development, see Thierry, 'Culte du cerf'.

16 Cf. the sun's presence as effectively the third, central antler of the god Cernunnos on the Celtic coin mentioned in Chapter 10. Note, too, the placement of the vessel of stolen sunlight between the lunar thief's horns in Old English *Riddle 29*, discussed in Chapter 11.

17 Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, II, 192–3.

could therefore combine, as in Guillaume le Clerc of Normandy's early thirteenth-century *Bestiaire divin* 'Divine Bestiary', in which the stag represents Christ harrowing Hell and defeating the serpent Satan.¹⁸ A related idea may be entertained for *Sólarljóð* 78, with the antler—a natural symbol of the cycle of death and rebirth—representing the resurrective Cross,¹⁹ as well as, perhaps, the Word of God and the shining, righteous souls which Christ liberated from Hell during the Harrowing.

A stanza as obscure as *Sólarljóð* 78 admits more than one Christian interpretation, however. It could also reflect the popular medieval legend of the Invention of the Cross. According to the version of the story told by the Old English poet Cynewulf, St. Helena travelled to Jerusalem in search of the Cross at the request of her son, the Emperor Constantine, who had seen a vision of it.²⁰ Having learnt that a Jew called Judas knew the site, Helena had him tortured until he took her men to the hill where Christ died and implored God to reveal the burial place. Immediately, an emission of smoke did just that. In this light, *Sólarljóð*'s *Sólkatla* 'Sun-Cauldron' may recall St. Helena, whose name derives via Latin from Greek *Ἑλένη*, feminine of *Ἐλενος* 'Bright One'. *Sólkötlu synir* 'Sólkatla's sons' may suggest, albeit approximately, Helena's son Constantine and the men who recovered the Cross for her. The *faðir* 'father', while principally being the poem's speaker, may also suggest the overseeing God the Father, as well as perhaps a priest. The wise *Vígdvalinn* (or *Vig(g)dvalinn*)²¹ may suggest Judas, whom Cynewulf describes as extremely wise, and who was, in effect, the guardian of the buried Cross. Judas' delay in revealing the Cross's location could tie in with the second element in the name *Vígdvalinn*: *-dvalinn* 'delayed', past participle of *dvelja*. Especially if this Judas were associated with his more famous namesake—who also 'delayed' in recognizing Christ—this would encourage identification of the first element *Víg-* as *víg* 'homicide'.²²

18 M. Thiébaux, *The Stag of Love: The Chase in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, 1974), 40–6. It is also a snake-trampling deer that represents the Devil-conquering Christ in the *Icelandic Physiologus*.

19 The Cross too was inscribed, bearing the letters *INRI*, short for *Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum* 'Jesus the Nazarene, King of Jews'.

20 R. E. Bjork (ed. and trans.), *The Old English Poems of Cynewulf* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013), 141–235.

21 For simplicity, I generally use only the first possible form of the name henceforth.

22 I discuss the name *Vígdvalinn/Vig(g)dvalinn* further below.

A third possible Christian interpretation relates Sólkatla to the *mulier amicta sole* 'woman clothed in the sun' of *Revelation* 12.²³ This woman, who had *luna sub pedibus eius* 'the moon under her feet' and a crown of stars on her head, was pregnant with a male child, who was commonly interpreted as Christ. She was interpreted as Mary, mother of God, who was often viewed as a vessel (cf. 'Sun-Cauldron') and as a second Eve, the mother of mankind. Furthermore, Ælfric described Mary as *wlitigre ðonne se mona, forðan ðe heo scinð buton æteorunge hire beorhtnysse. Heo is gecoren swa swa sunne mid leoman healicra mihta* 'more beautiful than the moon, because she shines without failing of her brightness. She is as choice as the sun with light of exalted powers'.²⁴ As such, Sólkatla might represent Mary, while her sons might be the Apostles or angels, or mankind in general. The 'father' could again be suggestive of God the Father. Vígdvalinn could represent the *mulier's* murderous foe, a giant red dragon with *cornua decem* 'ten horns', whose tail swept stars from the sky and flung them to earth. Angels defeated this horned beast, which is identified with Satan, and hurled it to earth (*in terram*). Since it then continued to pursue the woman, there is a sense that it bore at least one horn from the earth, as Vígdvalinn bore a horn from a burial mound.²⁵

A fourth possible Christian interpretation casts Vígdvalinn in a markedly different light. Rather than being an evil figure, he could represent Christ as the holy stag who, after 'delaying' for three days, rose from the dead.²⁶ The inscribed antler could symbolize the Cross and the Word of God, being Christ's gift of salvation for mankind, the sons of Sólkatla/Mary. In this light we might compare *Vígdvalinn* to *Beowulf's* *Wiglaf* 'Holy Leaving/Heirloom' who bears the Cross-like standard from the dragon's barrow (*hlæw* 2773). Not only may OE *Wig-* 'Holy' relate to *Vig-* in *Vígdvalinn* (compare ON *vígsla* 'consecration, ordination'), but there is even a sense in which *Wiglaf* 'delayed' virtuously. When his companions fled to the wood, he alone stayed behind to help *Beowulf* slay the dragon.

23 Perhaps the sound of *-katla* would suggest to some *kyrtla*, genitive plural of *kyrtill* 'gown'.

24 Thorpe, *Homilies*, I, 444.

25 It might, however, be difficult to attribute benign significance to the Biblical beast's horns.

26 See especially Brennecke, 'Zur Strophe 78'. Amory, 'Norse-Christian Syncretism', I, 1–25 at 13 identifies Vígdvalinn with St. Peter, but the apostle took nothing from Christ's tomb.

Given the highly enigmatic, dream-like nature of *Sólarljóð*, more than one of these suggested interpretations may be tenable at once.

The Solar Antler, the Dwarf-Horse-Stag(?) and a Solar Sword

Stanzas 78–9 of *Sólarljóð* also warrant interpretation as a heathen Norse myth, or perhaps rather as a Christian poet's reinvention of one. The only otherwise-attested character in these stanzas is Njörðr (Njörðr), the heathen Norse sea-deity who fathered Freyr and Freyja. All the other names in these stanzas, those otherwise unknown, are similarly of Germanic origin. From this perspective these stanzas appear to describe the recovery of a solar hart's horn by a father-figure and the sons of a sun-goddess.

The likely goddess is Sólkatla, whose name encapsulates an image of the sun as a fiery cauldron. Although this could, in theory, be a newly invented image, it is consistent with an ancient and widespread idea that the sun travelled in a cauldron, especially by night.²⁷ This concept appears in early Greek myth and is reflected in representations of the sun's vehicle on Late Bronze Age cauldrons from Hungary, Italy and Scandinavia, as well as probably in rock-art from Scandinavia (this possibly being the region where it originated); it is perhaps most remarkably evidenced by a cauldron of the Scandinavian Bronze Age from Skallerup, Zealand, which stands on what have been described as two wheeled, swan-headed 'ships'.²⁸ This finding encourages belief that at least this part of *Sólarljóð* may reflect traditional aspects of heathen solar mythology.

Sólkatla's sons may be personified sunbeams, akin to Skírnir in *För Skírnis*. They are implicitly contrasted with the mysterious 'sons of waning/dark moons' who ride from the north in stanza 56.

From this perspective, the 'father' — Sólkatla's husband? — is harder to identify. Perhaps he is Freyr, the bright ruler of the sun who killed Beli with an antler. In *För Skírnis* he certainly gains a radiant, sun-like bride, though Gerðr is better identified with the moon, which shines

27 On this concept see Panchenko, 'Scandinavian Background', an article that does not, however, mention Sólkatla.

28 See Panchenko, 'Scandinavian Background', 10–15 with fig. 6.

with light taken from the sun. Freyr was certainly considered a dynastic progenitor, and early evidence that he was a supreme father-figure comes from Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's late ninth-century poem *Haustlǫng* 'Autumn-Long', stanza 10 of which refers to *allar áttir Ingi-freys* 'all the kindreds of the Ingi-lord/Ingi-Freyr'.²⁹

Whoever the 'father' might represent from a heathen perspective, there may well have been a tradition that a lost solar weapon, symbolized by an antler, was recovered from the ground. For the wording of the first half of *Sólarljóð* 78 appears teasingly ambiguous.³⁰ A listener might at first suppose that *arfi* is the dative singular of *arfr* 'inheritance' acting as the direct object of *ráðit*, past participle of *ráða*, a verb whose meanings when governing the dative include 'have', 'possess' and 'rule'. This would give the initial impression that the stanza begins: 'I alone, your father and the sons of Sólkatla, have gained possession of your inheritance'. Only upon hearing the stanza's second half would it become apparent that the direct object of *ráðit* is rather the accusative *hjartarhorn* 'hart's horn', and that, as such, *arfi* is the vocative of the noun meaning 'son', 'heir' and *ráðit* must mean 'read, interpret'. In other words, the stanza initially gives the impression that the father and the sons of Sólkatla gained possession of the son's inheritance, only to replace that impression with the reading of the hart's horn. But the listener's mind does not wholly erase its first impression; rather, it assimilates it into an assumption that the father and the sons of Sólkatla gained possession of an ancestral antler from Vígdvalinn, which they then read. This blended impression neatly condenses the essential points of the solar weapon's recovery and subsequent significance.

In stanza 78, there remains one named character to identify a non-Christian mythological basis for: the wise *Vígdvalinn* or maybe *Vig(g)dvalinn*. Neither possible form of the name is attested elsewhere, but both are composed of recognizable elements, only the first of which differs (*víg* versus *vig*). Both possible forms of the name need considering for their potential significance in terms of heathen mythology, and it may be a mistake to insist on a firm choice of one or the other in this context.

29 North, *Haustlǫng*, 6–7 (adapted).

30 See also Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 352. B. E. Schorn, *Speaker and Authority in Old Norse Wisdom Poetry* (Berlin, 2017), 124–33 at 132 observes that 'the interpretation of this stanza is both conceptually and structurally difficult'.

To start with the second possibility, *Vigdvalinn*, the first element (*vig-*) could be a combining form of the noun *vigr* ‘spear’, the buried antler perhaps being imagined as a pronged spear. If so, it would appear exceptional as there seem to be no other attested compounds with *vigr* ‘spear’ as their first element. Alternatively, *vig-* might represent (or be a scribal error for) *vigg-* ‘horse’.³¹ As noted earlier, the name’s second element, *-dvalinn*, is interpretable as the past participle of *dvelja* ‘to dwell, delay’, in which case **Viggdvalinn* could be the ‘Horse That Delayed’. But the same participle is also, in my view, attested as the personal name of two creatures of Norse mythology which probably shed more light on this character’s nature.

Dvalinn is the name of a mythological stag, one of four which chew the shoots of the world-tree in *Grímnismál* 33, as also in *Gylfaginning*.³² *Dáinn*, *Dvalinn*, *Duneyrr* and *Duraþrór*.³³ This finding invites us to identify *Sólarljóð*’s antler-bearer as a stag, even as one who bit off an antler-like twig of the radiant world-tree.

Dvalinn is also the name of a dwarf, as is *Dáinn* ‘One Who Has Died’. This seems unlikely to be coincidence, especially as the constituent elements of the name of the third listed stag, *Duraþrór*, may well find parallel in the dwarf-names *Dúri*, *Durinn*, *Dúrnir* and *Þrór*. Of the four stag-names, only *Duneyrr* lacks a clear dwarven equivalent, but it might be explained as a compound of *dun* ‘noise’ (or **dun* ‘dun’) + *eyrr* ‘gravelly bank’, in light of the dwarves’ journey to the dwellings of *Aurvangar* ‘Mud Plains’ at *Jöruvellir* ‘Mud Fields(?)’ in *Völuspá* 14.³⁴

31 One manuscript of *Sólarljóð* has the garbled form *vijgdarannlinn*, which at least has an initial element with two consonants (*vijg-*). Cf. *LP* s.v. *vigr* 3); but note also the emendation, in a list of terms for horses, of *vigliitnir* to *víggliitnir*, explained as ‘war-glittering one’ (rather than **viggliitnir* ‘glittering horse’), in *PTP*, 936–7.

32 *SnEGylf*, 18.

33 Note also a verse list of ‘stag’-names in *PTP*, 898–900; it includes *Duraþrór*, *Duneyrr*, *Dáinn* and *Dvalarr*, the last of which names is probably a variant of *Dvalinn*, one perhaps related to New Norwegian *dvalen* ‘lazy, sleepy’.

34 Alternatively, *Duneyrr* might mean ‘Dun-Eared One’ (*eyra* ‘ear’) or, if rather *Dúneyrr*, ‘Downy-Eared One’. Then again, we might look to the dwarf-name *Dúrnir*, which sounds not too dissimilar. See *PTP*, 899. Possibly the four Old Norse stags symbolize the cardinal directions, a function elsewhere attributed to dwarves, albeit differently named ones; Tolley, *Shamanism*, I, 339. Perhaps germane, too, is the close association between stags and smiths in early Celtic tradition (see Enright, *Sutton Hoo Sceptre*, 173–5, 338–9), as dwarves were celebrated metal-smiths (*pace* Enright, *Sutton Hoo Sceptre*, 173: ‘the ancient relationship between smith and stag in Celtic culture ... is not one that can be found in the early medieval Germanic sphere’).

Taken together with Grelant, the dwarf-horse-stag(?) of *Samsons saga fagra*, and the dwarf-horse-deer(?) of the Old English charm *Wið dweorh*, both of whom may well have concealed the sun or sunshine (see Chapter 12), this evidence suggests to me that the antler-bearer of *Sólarljóð* could be a dwarf-stag (or dwarf-horse-stag) who had buried a twig-like solar antler in a grave-mound. This impression strengthens with the discovery that the dwarf Dvalinn was most likely a lunar creature who stole sunshine but, having ‘delayed’ his departure from the night sky as he played with it, was destroyed at dawn by the first rays of the rising sun. We turn to him next, along with consideration of the other possible form of the name of *Sólarljóð*’s antler-bearer, *Vígðvalinn*.

Svaflami and Dvalinn

Illustrative of the notion of a dwarf-stag who produces a solar weapon from the ground may be an episode featuring the dwarf Dvalinn in the mid-seventeenth century *U*-version of *Heiðreks saga*.³⁵ It describes how Óðinn’s grandson, King Svaflami, chased a hart deep into a forest until sunset, without managing to catch it. At sunset, Svaflami, who was by now lost deep in the forest, saw a large stone and two dwarves beside it. Although this story is recorded only very late and makes no explicit identification of this stag with one of the two dwarves, beneath the narrative’s surface might lie the concept of a creature who was stag by day and dwarf by night. Whether that is the case or not, the story’s continuation includes other details suggestive of a link with *Sólarljóð*’s *Vígðvalinn*.

Svaflami *vígði* ‘consecrated’ the outside of the large stone *með málajárni* ‘with marked/signed-iron’, presumably an iron sword marked with (runic?) signs.³⁶ He also drew his sword over the dwarves, whereupon they begged for *ffjǫrlausn* ‘life-loosening’. Presumably the pair were magically immobilized and feared being kept above ground until sunrise, when they would be turned to stone. The dwarves named

35 See Tolkien, *Saga*, 67–8 and the introductory remarks about the cursed sword at ix–xi.

36 Tolkien, *Saga*, 68 n. observes that *-járni* is a later addition. Another version reads *málasaxi* ‘short, one-edged sword marked with signs’; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, I, 514; it also names Dvalinn as the first of the two dwarves, the other being Dulinn.

themselves Durinn and Dvalinn. Svafrlami, who knew them to be the most skilful of dwarves, commanded them to make him the best of swords. It was to have a golden hilt, scabbard and baldric, and an unfailing blade, and it was always to confer victory upon its wielder.

The dwarves made him the sword, which was *it fríðasta* ‘the most beautiful’. However, when delivering the weapon, Dvalinn cursed it. As he stood at the stone’s entrance, he declared that the sword would kill a man every time it was drawn, that it would commit three of the most heinous deeds,³⁷ and that it would be the death of Svafrlami himself. At once, Svafrlami swung the sword at Dvalinn, but the dwarf escaped into his stone.

The king called the sword Tyrfingr.³⁸ He used it to kill the giant Þjazi, his father’s killer, before taking the giant’s daughter, *Fríðr* ‘Peace’. Ultimately, though, a berserk slew Svafrlami with the same sword.³⁹

The late fourteenth- or early fifteenth-century *R*-version of the saga adds that whenever Tyrfingr was drawn *lýsti afsvá sem af sólar geisla* ‘light shone from it as from a sunbeam’, that it always brought victory to its wielder, and that it was renowned in all the ancient tales.⁴⁰ It attributes the sword’s forging to Dvalinn alone.⁴¹

Svafrlami’s acquisition of the sword which Dvalinn, a possible dwarf-stag, forged (or co-forged) and brought outside his stone may parallel the implied acquisition by the father and the sons of Sólkatla of the solar antler that Vígdvalinn carried from the burial-mound in *Sólarljóð*

37 Probably three kin-slayings, including two killings of brothers by King Heiðrekr, a worshipper of Freyr; Tolkien, *Saga*, x; cf. Unferð’s use of Hrunding(?) to kill his brother in *Beowulf*. Heiðrekr even manages to injure Óðinn with Tyrfingr; Tolkien, *Saga*, 31, 44.

38 On this sword, see *SASE5-7*, 417–8. Its name may mean ‘scion of a *tyrfi* [resinous fir-tree]’, which would make it a twig-sword, or derive from *Tervingi*, a name for the Visigoths that is thought to mean ‘dwellers in the wooded regions’ (cf. Gothic *triu* ‘tree’); see Tolkien, *Saga*, xxiv; Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 62; *PTP*, 802–3.

39 Tolkien, *Saga*, 68.

40 Tolkien, *Saga*, 1; see also 6, 20.

41 Tolkien, *Saga*, 15. A different version of Þjazi’s death appears in *SnESkald*, I, 2, but both versions may share the idea that the giant’s death was caused by solar fire. Snorri records that the gods lit fires by the wall of their stronghold (*borgarvegginn*) as soon as Þjazi flew over it as an eagle; the giant’s feathers immediately caught fire and he fell down among the gods, who killed him. The divine fires rising above the wall could be an image of the first red rays of the sun rising above the horizon, imagined (as possibly in Old English *Riddle* 29) as a wall (*veggr*). If so, we have a parallel with Þjazi’s death by the sunlike sword Tyrfingr.

(to his own demise?). We may also recall Hotherus's acquisition from Mimingus' cave, after a hunt, and after sunset, of the sword that will kill Balderus in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*.

Since a sword that shone like a sunbeam may well have been made from a sunbeam, Dvalinn could be implicated in an acquisition, probably illicit, of sunlight—an implication strengthened by other evidence to be adduced shortly. The 'father' in *Sólarljóð* clearly viewed the antler as his heir's rightful inheritance, which raises the possibility that Vígdvalinn possessed it unjustly.⁴²

Another possible parallel between *Sólarljóð* and the Svafrlami-episode concerns the first element *Víg* (rather than *Vig(g)*) in *Vígdvalinn*. This element is itself ambiguous, perhaps deliberately so. As noted earlier, it could be the common Old Norse noun for 'homicide' (or 'battle'), which would encourage the belief that Vígdvalinn had acquired the antler violently. But, also as noted earlier, *víg* may alternatively mean 'holy' or 'consecrated'. The cognate verb *vígja* (compare German *weihen* 'to sanctify') describes Svafrlami's use of a sign-inscribed sword to 'consecrate' the stone and immobilize the dwarves in *Heiðreks saga*;⁴³ the same verb is used in *Brymskviða* 30 of Mjöllnir's destruction of Prymr, the giant who guarded the stolen fulgural hammer underground; it also describes Þórr's attack on the fever-causing giant in the *Canterbury Runic Charm*.⁴⁴ The name Vígdvalinn might therefore point to a similar 'consecration' of this dwarf by the father or Sólkatla's sons, one that similarly compelled the dwarf to bring a solar weapon, the hart's horn, from the barrow. *Víg*-might also indicate the dwarf's prophetic power, given the parallel of OE *wiglung* 'divination, soothsaying, sorcery' and Dvalinn's prophetic curse in *Heiðreks saga*.

Stanza 80 of *Sólarljóð*, though also obscure, may offer support for the impression that similarities with the Svafrlami-episode of *Heiðreks saga* are not coincidental:

42 Note, however, that Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* (8.115), records the belief that stags bury their right antlers, which contain a healing drug and are never found; Rackham, *Pliny*, III, 82. Also, Saxo does not record that Mimingus had stolen his sword. A possibly comparable giant called Faunus had stolen a golden-hilted, dwarf-made sword, though (see Chapter 12 n. 56).

43 See also an episode in McDonald, 'Nitiða saga', 134–5.

44 See further Taggart, *How Thor Lost his Thunder*, 162–73.

‘Hverju bölví þeir belt hafa
 Sváfr ok Sváfrlogi;
 blóð þeir vöktu ok benjar sugu
 ey undir illum vana.’ (80)⁴⁵

‘Every evil they have dealt, Sváfr and Sváfrlogi; they awoke blood and sucked wounds, always with ill custom.’

The identities of *Sváfr* and *Sváfrlogi* (or *Svafr* and *Svafrlogi*) are uncertain. Possibly they relate to the *Sváfaðr* mentioned in *Sólarljóð* 11 as an unfortunate person who slew, and was himself slain by, his friend in a duel over a radiant woman. But these names have also been compared to the Óðinn-alias *Sváfnir* ‘Putter to Sleep’.⁴⁶ Equally, their drawing of blood and sucking of wounds might identify them as carrion beasts or dragons, like the snake *Sváfnir* of *Grímnismál* 34, and the dragon *Niðhoggr* of *Völuspá* 39, which *saug* ‘sucked’ corpses. However, the terms *svelgr* ‘swallower’ and *niðhoggr/níðhoggr* also appear in a list of sword-names in *Skáldskaparmál*.⁴⁷ At the same time, the names *Sváfr* and *Sváfrlogi* are similar enough to *Svafrlami* to raise the possibility of some relationship to a version of the story told in *Heiðreks saga*. Perhaps—though this is no more than a guess—this stanza describes the infamous career of a deadly flaming sword called *Sváfrlogi* ‘Sleeping/Sleep Flame’,⁴⁸ a weapon made by Vígdvalinn and wielded by *Sváfr* (a shortening of *Svafrlami*?)—with which he did great harm by killing people.

In some respects, the story of *Svafrlami*’s acquisition of Tyrfingr in *Heiðreks saga* also parallels Beowulf’s acquisition of the giant sword, with the exception that the latter weapon lacks an explicit curse—it does, however, bear an ominous inscription about strife and has a destiny to slay its possessors, the giants. Thus, the stag-hunt in *Beowulf* is similarly followed by the hero’s attack on a giant (a creature akin to

45 Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 355.

46 Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 355.

47 *SnESkald*, I, 120; *PTP*, 806–8. Note also the ‘sword’-term *Fjörsváfnir*, translated ‘life-quencher’ in *ibid.*, 794–5.

48 Had it lain ‘asleep’, like the antler, in the ground? Or like the submerged giant sword, which shone suddenly in Grendel’s cave? Cf. also the radiant sword *Gunnlogi* which, in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, a dwarf gave to Vilhjálmr while he slept (see Chapter 12). Was the name *Svafrlogi* also intended to suggest *vaflogi*, the ‘flicker-flame’ surrounding the homes of Gerðr and Menglōð, or is this just a coincidence?

dwarves) with a sword (Hrunting) *wundenmæl* ‘wound with signs’ or ‘adorned with winding signs’, 1531)—compare Sváfrlami’s *málajárn*—and subsequent acquisition from the giants’ home of a more marvellous sword. This second sword was similarly golden-hilted, beautiful (*wlitig*, 1662) and of sun-like radiance. Furthermore, Beowulf similarly used it to overcome giants and end their monstrous attacks (compare Sváfrlami’s gaining of *Fríðr* ‘Peace’).

Dvalinn and the Deaths of Alvíss and Hrímgrerðr

The natures of the antler and its bearer in *Sólarljóð* are probably also illuminated by what we learn of dwarves, and especially Dvalinn, from other Old Norse texts.

Vígdvalinn is *vítr* ‘wise’, like the dwarves described as *veggbergs vísir* ‘wall-rock’s wise ones’ in *Völuspá* 48. His wisdom perhaps encompassed runic lore, as the antler was inscribed with runes (though not by him). Stanza 143 of the Eddic poem *Hávamál* records that Dvalinn carved powerful rune-staves for the dwarves.

Vígdvalinn’s wisdom may well have encompassed metal-working, as dwarves are renowned smiths. This could be relevant if, as seems likely, the horn he guards is a golden antler. We have seen that Dvalinn forged a marvellous gold-hilted sword for Sváfrlami. He also contributed to the forging of Freyja’s necklace in *Sörla þátr*.⁴⁹

More importantly, Dvalinn possessed the sun, or rather (it seems) some of its light, at least temporarily and to his undoing. Another Eddic poem, *Alvíssmál* ‘The Sayings of Alvíss’, records that *kalla dvergar Dvalins leika* ‘the dwarves call [sól “the sun”] Dvalinn’s play-sister/play-thing/playmate [or “deluder”]’ (16).⁵⁰ Similarly, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* 24 records that the horse of *Dagur* ‘Day’ *dro leik Dvalins ... i reip* ‘drew Dvalinn’s playmate/plaything [i.e., the sun] in a chariot’.⁵¹ Judging from the meaning of his name, it seems likely that Dvalinn played too long in the morning sky with pilfered sunlight, and that, being *dvalinn* ‘delayed’ above ground, he was destroyed, possibly through petrification, by

49 FSN, I, 367–8.

50 On the term *Dvalins leika*, see K. von See, B. La Farge, E. Picard, K. Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, Bd. 3: *Götterlieder* (Heidelberg, 2000), 336–40; *PTP*, 910–11.

51 Lassen, *Hrafnagaldur*, 93.

the rays of the rising sun. Such, at least, seems to be the similar fate in *Alvíssmál* of the titular *Alvíss* ‘All-Wise’. He was a dwarf with a giantish appearance—Þórr declares ‘*pursa líki þikki mér á þér vera*’ ‘“There seems to me to be the likeness of giants in you”’ (2)—who might actually be Dvalinn by another name.⁵² *Alvíss*, an erudite but unwary character, tried to make off with Þórr’s daughter without his permission. Þórr, however, tricked him into staying above ground at daybreak by asking him principally about the various races’ names for aspects of the natural world, including the moon and the sun. Finally, having delayed him long enough, Þórr declared:

‘Í einu brjósti ek sák aldregi
fleiri forna stafi;
miklum tálum ek kveð tældan þik:
uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,
nú skínn sól í sali.’ (35)

‘In a single breast I’ve never seen more ancient staves; by great tricks I declare you’ve been duped: you’re up, dwarf, as it has dawned; now the sun shines in the halls!’

We may infer that the sun’s light kills *Alvíss*. The ‘ancient staves’ Þórr mentions seem to be a usefully ambiguous metaphor. In one respect, as rune-staves/words, they denote the many points of erudition that *Alvíss* has enumerated: we may compare, in *Vafþrúðnismál* 1, Óðinn’s desire to contend *á fornum stofum* ‘in ancient staves’ with a giant who, having spoken *forna stafi* in competition with the god of wisdom (and possibly sunlight) (55), is destined to lose his head. In another respect, they denote the sun’s beams, which strike the hapless dwarf.⁵³ *Sólarljóð* 40 describes the sun as *setta dreyrstöfum* ‘set with bloody-staves’ (i.e.,

52 As proposed in P. Acker, ‘Dwarf-Lore in *Alvíssmál*’, in P. Acker and C. Larrington (ed.), *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* (New York, 2002), 213–27 at 220, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357736>

53 Cf. *Sólarljóð* 61: *blóðgar rúnir vāru ā brjósti þeim / merkðar meinliga* ‘bloody runes were painfully marked on their breast’, the sufferers being envious men. In Baltic myth the thundergod Perkunas, who is married to the sun, cleaves the moon with a sword for having seduced the sun’s daughter; Cashford, *Moon*, 213–4. It seems to me quite likely that *Alvíss*, who sought to marry Þórr’s daughter (possibly *Þrúðr* ‘Strength’), may once have personified the dark or waning moon, or been closely connected with it.

sunbeams imagined as red runes), an image we may also connect with the runes inscribed on Vígdvalinn's antler.

These points and others are clarified by comparison with one of the clearest Old Norse parallels to Alvíss's demise, namely the petrification of the giantess *Hrímgerðr* 'Rime-Gerðr', daughter of Hati, in the Eddic *Helgakviða Hjörvarðzsonar* 'Poem of Helgi, son of Hjörvarðr'.⁵⁴ This poem is explicit about *Hrímgerðr* having been *dvalða* 'delayed' (compare *Dvalinn*) above ground until dawn by the words of *Atli* 'Terrible One',⁵⁵ a warrior in the service of the titular *Helgi* 'Holy One', and of *Helgi* himself:

'Austr líttu nú, *Hrímgerðr*, er þik lostna hefr
Helgi helstöfum!
Á landi ok á vatni borgit er lofðungs flota
ok siklings mǫnnum it sama.

'Dagr er nú, *Hrímgerðr*, en þik dvalða hefir
Atli til adrlaga;
hafnar mark þykkir hlæglikt vera,
þars þú í steins líki stendr!' (29–30)

'Look east now, *Hrímgerðr*, since *Helgi* has struck you with *Hel*/deadly-staves! On land and on water the leader's fleet is protected and the prince's men likewise.

'It's day now, *Hrímgerðr*, and *Atli* has delayed you to your life's end; you'll seem to be a laughable harbour-mark, there where you stand in the form of a stone!'

The notion that *Helgi* 'struck' the giantess with staves is interesting, since he has not physically touched her. As in *Alvíssmál*, these staves seem to be a metaphor both for words and the first rays of the morning sun.⁵⁶

54 The nocturnal giantess killed by *Grettir* was similarly turned to stone by the early morning sun, according to some; Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 213. See further K. von See, B. La Farge, W. Gerhold, D. Dusse, E. Picard and K. Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Bd. 4: Heldenlieder* (Heidelberg, 2004), 525–6; also my discussion of *Freyja*'s encounter with the giantess *Hyndla* in Chapter 14.

55 *Atli* is also recorded as an alias of Þórr; *PTP*, 758–9.

56 A related solar meaning may be encoded in an episode found in chapter 5 of *Ketils saga hængs*; *FSN*, II, 168–72. The eponymous hero went fishing at *Skofar*, a place identified as probably the Norwegian island of *Skrova* by B. Waggoner (trans.), *The*

Helgi's victory over Hrímgæðr also appears comparable to Skírnir's over Gerðr in *För Skírnis*. Not only do the conquered giantesses share the name Gerðr, but the object of Freyr's desire is linked repeatedly with *hrím* 'rime/frost', the first element in *Hrímgæðr*. Thus, Skírnir declares that, if Gerðr does not accept Freyr, she will be condemned to witness the giant *Hrímnir* gawping at her (*För Skírnis* 28) and to possession by the giant *Hrímgrímnir* (35); and she cements her accord with Skírnir by offering him a *hrímkálkr* 'rime-cup' (37). Also, rather as Atli states that Hrímgæðr will be taken by an appalling shaggy giant (*Helgakviða Hjörvarðzsonar* 25), so Skírnir declares that Gerðr will be given to *hrímþursar* 'rime-giants' (30, 34).⁵⁷ Again, rather as Hrímgæðr will be a laughable harbour-mark, so Gerðr, a giantess whose name suggests enclosed land but who is also closely linked to the sea, will be an *undrsjón* 'wondrous sight' (28).⁵⁸ Both

Hrafnista Sagas (New Haven, 2012), 202 n. 27. From the harbour Ketill saw on the headland a pitch-black troll-woman (potentially a dark-moon creature like those I identify in Chapter 14). She had just emerged from the sea and *glotti við sólumni* 'grinned (sneeringly) at the sun'. The two exchanged verses in which, among other things, Ketill declared *at uppiverandi sólu* 'by the uprisen sun' that he had never seen a more loathsome sight; she identified herself as *Forað* (*Forat*), a word for a dangerous place (or situation) that often denotes a bog (cf. *PTP*, 725–7); he addressed her as *fóstra* 'foster-mother'; she referred to her *skálm* 'short sword' and her intentions to set fire to places *áðr dagr á mik skíni* 'before day shines on me' and *gnúa* 'to rub' him (doubtless sexually). She then fumbled for him, but he notched one of his three magical arrows and shot her *undir fjöðrina* 'under the feather/fin' as she changed *í hvalslíki* 'into whale-form'. At that she screamed and, we may presume, died. We are not told which arrow Ketill shot, but since *Forað* declared that she did not fear the arrow *Hremsa* 'Claw/Paw/Clutch/Shaft' and thought *Flaug* 'Flight' and *Fífa* 'Cotton Grass' were far away, it was most likely one of the latter two. If it was *Fífa*, *Forað* may well have died by (implicitly sexual) penetration by a burning 'candle-arrow', since cotton grass (*Eriophorum*)—a sedge often found in bogs—was used to make candlewicks (see *CV* s.v. *ffju-kveykr* 'a wick of *fífa*'). *Fífa* could then represent a candle-arrow comparable to a radiant solar shaft; it could also be functionally equivalent to the radiant candle-sword of *Beowulf*, which may well similarly have dispatched Grendel's mother in the form of a monstrous fish (see Chapter 15). In the context, it would make sense for the encounter to end with a radiant, airborne weapon punishing *Forað* for her initially dismissive insolence to the sun. Broadly speaking, such a climax might also be expected because only shortly earlier, in chapter 4, another hostile encounter between Ketill and a troll, set in a similar location, apparently ended when dawn broke and the monster *hoarf* 'disappeared'; *FSN*, II, 167, and see Waggoner, *Hrafnista Sagas*, 202 n. 23. A related saga describes these arrows as dwarf-made, self-directed, implicitly self-returning and *gulli fiðraðar* 'feathered with gold'; *FSN*, II, 213–4.

57 For a study of this word, see Frog, 'The (De)Construction of Mythic Ethnography II: *Hrímpurs* and Cosmogony (a Contribution to the Vanir Debate)', *RMN Newsletter* 8 (2014), 38–55.

58 Like also *Lúða* in *Hjálmþés saga* (see Chapter 7).

giantesses, furthermore, share essentially the same fate: although Gerðr is not petrified by the implicitly solar Skírnir, having been assaulted by his words and at least threatened with being struck (*drep, Fǫr Skírnis* 26) by his *tamsvoðndr/gambanteinn*, she is overcome by his *stafi* '(rune-)staves' (36), just as Hrímgærd is struck and defeated by Helgi's.

In addition, it seems that both giantesses' fathers are slain by the hero with a sword of probably solar nature. Skírnir declares that Gymir will sink before the edges of the sword he acquired from Freyr (*Fǫr Skírnis* 25). Hrímgærd's father, Hati, who shares his name with the wolf that hunts the sun in *Grímnismál*, is killed by Helgi, most likely with the sword to which he was directed by a valkyrie:

'Sverð veit ek liggja í Sigarshólmi,
fjórum færa en fimm tǫgu;
eitt er þeira ǫllum betra,
vígnesta þǫl, ok varit gulli.

'Hringr er í hjalti, hugr er í miðju,
ógn er í oddi, þeim er eiga getr;
liggr með eggju ormr dreyrfáðr,
en á valþǫstu verpr naðr hala.'
(*Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 8–9)

'I know of swords lying in *Sigarshólmr* "Sigarr's Island", four fewer than fifty; one of them is better than all (others), the bale of battle-brooches/fastenings(?) [i.e., shields/armour?], and adorned with gold.

'A ring is in the hilt, courage is in the middle, terror is in the point, for the one who gets to own it; there lies along the edge a blood-stained snake, and on the slaughter/knob-cord(?) [i.e., hilt-binding(?)] an adder lashes its tail.'

The references to 'courage' in the middle and 'terror' in the point of this sword may be to runic spells inscribed in a practice comparable to that recommended by another valkyrie in the Eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* 'Sayings of Sigrdrífa' (6). If so, Helgi's sword appears comparable to the golden *málfán* 'sign/mark-adorned' (*Fǫr Skírnis* 23, 25) sword with which Skírnir threatened Gerðr,⁵⁹ and to the *málajárn* with which Svafrlami incapacitated the dwarves Durinn and Dvalinn. It also

⁵⁹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, Bd. 4, 462.

resembles Beowulf's giant sword, which was similarly the *wæpna cyst* 'choicest of weapons' (1559), adorned with gold (*gylden hilt* 1676, *scennum sciran goldes* 1694), 'ring-marked' (*hringmæl* 1564), inscribed with runes, and wavy-marked (*brogdenmæl* 1667), which is also to say marked with wavy, curling, serpent-like patterns as a result of pattern-welding. Furthermore, Beowulf similarly found his sword among many other items of armour and weaponry (1557, 1612–4); and it was located in a submerged cave, which, though not an island, may be functionally equivalent to one in that it shares the property of being enclosed by water. The wording of *Helgakviða Hjörvarðzsonar* 29 seems likely, therefore, to reflect an earlier notion that Hríngerðr had been *lostna* 'struck' with the same sort of weapon, a rune-inscribed solar sword.

We may conclude that Hríngerðr and Gerðr, and Hati and Gymir, are counterparts. It also appears that the stories in which they appear are fundamentally variants of the same myth involving them as giants and giantesses—probably originally identified or linked with the moon⁶⁰—who are defeated by the arrival of the sun.

Returning to Dvalinn, and therefore potentially Vígdvalinn, both his name and his race could well identify him as a lunar creature. As noted when discussing *Riddle* 29, the moon sometimes appears to linger too long in the sky, only to be overcome by the sun, which in time reclaims its light and wholly outshines its rival, causing the moon to fade from view. Dvalinn probably 'delayed' too long playing with his solar toy of pilfered sunshine.

That Dvalinn, like other dwarves, was connected with the moon may be indicated by the name of the site of his race's ancestral hall, according to the first half of *Vǫluspá* 37:

'Stóð fyr norðan á Niðavøllum
salr ór gulli Sindra ættar.'

'There stood to the north, on Niðavellir, the hall of the race of *Sindri* 'Cindery'
[a dwarf], made from gold.'

As we have seen, the place-name *Niðavellir* is ambiguous. It could mean 'Kinsmen's Plains' (< *niðr* 'kinsman' + *vellir* 'plains'), but its likely principal meaning is 'Dark/Waning Moons' Plains' (< ON *nið* + *vellir*).

60 On lunar giants and giantesses, see further Chapter 14.

Another possibility is ‘Plains of *Niði* ‘Dark Moon’ [a dwarf]’, which would follow on from a reference to *Niði* earlier in the poem.

Dvalinn’s likely lunar connections are underlined by his association earlier in *Vǫluspá* with the dwarves *Nýji* (< *ný* ‘new [i.e., waxing or full] moon’)⁶¹ and *Niði* (< *nið* ‘dark or waning moon’).⁶² These three names appear together in *Vǫluspá* near the start of a list of dwarves which comes only six stanzas after prominent references to the sun and moon:

‘Nýi ok Niði, Norðri ok Suðri,
Austri ok Vestri, Alþjófr, Dvalinn.’ (*Vǫluspá* 11)

‘Full/Waxing Moon and Dark/Waning Moon, Northerly and Southerly,
Easterly and Westerly, All-Thief, Delayed.’

Furthermore, the immediate proximity of *Alþjófr* ‘All/Great-Thief’ to Dvalinn in this list underlines the likelihood that a lunar Dvalinn stole sunlight, the greatest treasure of all.⁶³

Interpretation of Dvalinn—and therefore potentially *Vígdvalinn*—as a dwarf identified with the moon may, together with the reference to the *niðja sonu* ‘sons of the dark phases of the moon’ in *Sólarljóð* 56, help to explain an obscure passage about a certain *Niðjungr* in the thirteenth-century Old Norse *Málsháttakvæði* ‘Proverb Poem’, one that might relate to the story behind *Sólarljóð* 78. The passage reads:

gulli mælti þjazi sjálfr,
Niðjungr skóf af haugi horn;
hølzti eru nú minni forn.⁶⁴ (8)

61 Although ON *ný* is also attested as a translation of Latin *novilunium* ‘new (i.e., dark) moon’, in the popular imagination the ‘new moon’ is the young waxing moon, not the dark moon. See CV s.v. *nið, ný, nýr*.

62 Gould, ‘Dwarf-Names’, 952, 963; PTP, 694–5. Gould lists other dwarf-names indicating radiance, such as *Dellingr* ‘Day, Gleaming One’, *Glóinn* ‘Glowing One’, *Ljómi* ‘Gleam/Beam’ (cognate with OE *leoma*), which may also reflect the association between dwarves and the moon and sun. Curiously, there was even a dwarf called *Ingi/Yngvi*.

63 An Old Norse plant-name also seems informed by such a myth. CV identifies *dverga-sóleyg*, literally ‘sun-eyed one of the dwarves’, as *Ranunculus glacialis*, a plant whose flower has a central ring of bright yellow.

64 R. Frank, ‘The *Málsháttakvæði* or “Proverb Poem” Englished’, in C. E. Karkov (ed.), *Poetry, Place, and Gender: Studies in Medieval Culture in Honor of Helen Damico* (Kalamazoo, 2009), 234–51 at 238; see also PTP, 1222–3.

Þjazi himself spoke with gold, Niðjungr scraped/took/stole a horn from a grave-mound; (these) memories are now extremely old.

Roberta Frank observes that the character Niðjungr is ‘unknown’,⁶⁵ presumably as there is no apparent reason to identify him with the Niðjungr of the Eddic poem *Rígsþula* ‘Rígr’s List’ (41). Interpreted, however, as the common noun ‘kinsman, descendant’ in relation to the preceding giant Þjazi, *niðjungr* might refer to a giant or a dwarf, given that, according to Snorri, dwarves arose as maggots in the flesh of the giant Ymir,⁶⁶ and that Alvíss resembles a giant in *Alvíssmál*. Another possibility, though, is that *Niðjungr* is the name of a dwarf associated, like *Niði* in *Völuspá*, with *nið* ‘the dark/waning moon’.⁶⁷ Niðjungr would then be a lunar dwarf who took a solar(?) horn from a grave-mound, perhaps as one of *Sólarljóð*’s ‘son’s of dark/waning moons’.⁶⁸ If so, the last line of this stanza would indicate that a likely variant of the myth of Vígdvalinn and the hart’s horn was considered ancient in the thirteenth century.⁶⁹

Runes of Resurrection

Having investigated the possible heathen background of stanza 78 of *Sólarljóð*, it remains to do the same for stanza 79. If, as seems very likely, the antler is a solar symbol, the runes—which is to say, *runestaves*—that Njörðr’s nine daughters inscribed, probably on the antler,

65 Frank, ‘*Málsháttakvæði*’, 245, n. 17. For other thoughts on this passage, see Clunies Ross, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, 353.

66 *SnEGylf*, 15.

67 CV s.v. *niðjungr*. That at least some dwarves were associated with the waning or dark moon, which is to say the visibly lacking or absent moon, would be in keeping with a recent characterization of these beings: ‘If we bear in mind that all kinds of absence seem to be the dominant feature of dwarfs, it seems to be precisely their negativity which makes them important At the very core of their essence lies not presence but absence’; Ármann Jakobsson, ‘The Hole’, 66, 69. Additionally, dwarves often *vanish* in medieval narratives.

68 Another dwarf associated with a horn is *Hornbori* ‘Horn-Borer/Bearer’ (*Völuspá* 13), though nothing more is known of him.

69 Note also Óláfr Tryggvason’s instruction to his dog *Vigi* in Bjarni Aðalbarnason, *Heimskringla*, I, 325: ‘*Vigi, tak hjörtinn!*’ ‘Vigi, take the hart!’, whereupon the dog attacked the fleet-footed Þórir *hjørtr*, who defended himself with a sword; on the nickname *hjørtr* ‘hart’, see D. Whaley, ‘Nicknames and Narratives in the Sagas’, *ANF* 108 (1993), 122–46 at 127, 140.

may reasonably be identified with the ‘bloody-staves’ with which the sun was ‘set’ according to stanza 40. They may also be connected more broadly with the implicitly solar staves with which Helgi defeated the frosty Hríngerðr at dawn; the rune-inscribed *gambanteinn* with which Skírnir overcame the frosty Gerðr, leading to her union with Freyr, the ‘fair-weather traveller’; and with the rune-inscribed and probably sun-like giant sword (possibly anticipated, I have argued, by the strong antlers of a hunted hart) with which Beowulf slew Grendel’s mother, the melting of which inspires an analogy with the thawing of ice in spring.

Each of these analogous stave-sets is associated with an attack on a giant or giants and the resurrection of the sun at dawn or in spring. Each is also associated with a liminal locale between land and sea, earth and water. We should investigate, therefore, whether much the same is the case with the inscribed antler of *Sólarljóð*.

That the antler’s rune-staves, taken from the earth, may have an aquatic, resurrective aspect is suggested by the nature of their inscribers. The nine daughters of the sea-god Njörðr, unknown outside *Sólarljóð*, may well be personified waves, equivalent to the nine daughters of the sea-giant Ægir whom I earlier connected with Vargeisa and her ‘double’ Ýma; the names of Ægir’s daughters seem to have been quite fluid, and the two names given in *Sólarljóð*—*Böðveig* ‘Battle-Drink’ and *Kreppvör* ‘Strait/Clench/Scrape(?)—Goddess’—look to be compatible with such a nature.⁷⁰ These nine daughters might also be associated with the nine ‘Njörðr-locks’ that secured Lævateinn in its submerged chest in *Svipdagsmál*. If they do have an aquatic nature, the antler was presumably under water at some point, like Lævateinn, Mistilteinn (see Chapter 15), Hrunting and the giant sword. Another reason for thinking the sea may be relevant is the parallel between *Sólkatla* and the Skallerup cauldron with its wheeled ‘ships’.

Vígdvalinn’s (enforced?) taking of a solar antler from the ground might well symbolize the dawn of a new day as the sun surmounted

70 Simek, *Dictionary*, 2 remarks of Ægir’s daughters that their names ‘appear to have been indefinite ... any synonym for “wave” could be used in poetry as a name for one of Ægir’s daughters’. According to Dronke and Dronke, *Growth of Literature*, 45, which does not mention *Sólarljóð*, the Vanir ‘will have been domiciled so long in the sea that it was no longer recalled in tradition as a specific piece of knowledge about them, only about Njörðr, their representative, caught up in vivid tales that survived for later record.’

the horizon. But there is another reason why the daughters of Njörðr and their runic inscription might have a resurrective aspect, one that would have special relevance to *Sólarljóð*. Njörðr was one of the Vanir gods, who appear likely to have mastered the power of resurrecting themselves and others from the dead. Such a power would explain their ability to wage war against the Æsir with a *vígspá* ‘battle/holy spell/prophesy’ in *Völuspá* 24.⁷¹ Furthermore, *Grímnismál* 14 says of Njörðr’s daughter Freyja, a likely valkyrie-goddess, that *hálfan val hon kýss hverjan dag, / en hálfan Óðinn á* ‘each day she selects half the slain, and Óðinn has [the other] half’, the inference being that she resurrects fallen men to live some kind of afterlife. Other Old Norse texts tell, or allude to, the story of a woman called *Hildir* ‘Battle’ (a valkyrie-name) who enabled a never-ending conflict between kings, the *Hjaðningavíg* ‘Battle of the Hjaðningar’, by magically resurrecting the slain each night so that they could continue fighting the next day.⁷² *Hildir* is often thought to reflect the character of Freyja, and in the account of this battle in *Sörla þáttr* it is indeed Freyja, rather than *Hildir*, who resurrects the dead.⁷³ If Freyja was among the daughters of Njörðr in *Sólarljóð*, or if his other daughters commanded similar power, the antler they inscribed would lend itself to Christian reinterpretation as a symbol of the Cross, through which Christ similarly enabled the resurrection of the dead.

Sólarljóð and *Beowulf*

I propose, therefore, that *Sólarljóð* 78–9 record or adapt a heathen myth about a dwarf, possibly a dwarf-stag (or even a dwarf-horse-stag) called *Vígdvalinn* (or *Vig(g)dvalinn*) who had hidden a rune-inscribed antler, symbolizing a sunbeam, in a burial-mound. In his dwarf form *Vígdvalinn* may well have been associated with the waning or dark moon, and he may well have stolen the solar antler, or at least acquired and buried it illicitly. Later, this solar treasure was implicitly reclaimed

71 See Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 42–4.

72 See J. Quinn, ‘The End of a Fantasy: *Sörla þáttr* and the Rewriting of the Revivification Myth’, in J. McKinnell, D. Ashurst and D. Kick (ed.), *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th-12th August, 2006*, 2 vols (Durham, 2006), II, 808–16.

73 FSN, I, 369–70.

as an heirloom by solar emissaries and a father-figure suggestive of a sun-controlling god. Its recovery might have been achieved, by analogy with *Heiðreks saga*, after a stag-hunt, which ended when the hunters forced the dwarf to delay dangerously long outside his mound. The antler bore rune-staves, which had been inscribed by Njörðr's nine aquatic(?) daughters, perhaps by night while the sun was supposedly in the sea. These runes represented sunbeams at dawn, and they conferred on the antler the power to revive the dead. From a Christian perspective, the solar antler therefore most likely symbolizes the radiant Cross in its redemptive function. It is recovered from its burial site as an heirloom in a story analogous to the Harrowing of Hell and perhaps to the Invention of the Cross.

The parallels between this interpretation and *Beowulf*, though inexact, appear encouragingly numerous and substantive. Thus, in *Beowulf*, following a description of a stag-hunt comparable to Norse myths about the capture of the sun by wolves (at least some lunar),⁷⁴ Beowulf, as emissary of the Bright-Danes who are devotees of the sun-god Ing (Yngvi-Freyr), similarly encounters a homicidal monster whose lair—at once aquatic and strangely terrestrial—conceals a rune-inscribed, probably sun-like sword, which the poet may have subtly compared to the strong antlers of the stag hunted by hounds. Beowulf overcomes this monster and recovers the sword, the shining runic hilt of which is a *laf* 'heirloom' (1687). The sword and especially its hilt (made partly of antler?), like the antler-heirloom of *Sólarljóð*, is implicitly identified with the Cross and the focus of an episode that probably evokes the Harrowing of Hell. The golden hilt is returned to Hroðgar, a father-figure to Beowulf, and to the sun-like stag-hall Heorot, presumably as their rightful inheritance.

74 It may be relevant to note that it is not only some giants who have lupine associations. So too do certain dwarves, judging from the second elements, each meaning 'wolf', of the following dwarf-names: *Aurvargr*, *Hleðjólfr*, *Hlévargr*, *Hljóðólfr*, *Mjødvitnir* and *Móðvitnir*; for these names, see Gould, 'Dwarf-Names'; *PTP*, 692–706.

14. Grendel, His Mother and Other Moon-Monsters

That Grendel and his mother—two *ellorgæstas* ‘alien visitors/spirits’ or ‘visitors/spirits from elsewhere’ (1349)—may have a mythologically lunar aspect is not readily apparent from *Beowulf*. If present, this aspect lies in the background, though it may have been more apparent to an Anglo-Saxon audience than it is today. It is chiefly further comparative evidence from Old English and Old Norse texts that now suggests this dimension to their nature. I have already adduced some of this evidence, the clearest being the similarities between Grendel’s mere and the Lake of the Moon in *Wonders*, between Grendel’s mother and the giantess *Mána* ‘Moon’ (about whom more below) in *Sörla saga sterka*, and between Grendel and the lunar thief of *Riddle 29*. The present chapter advances further evidence. It progresses from analysis of lunar and solar imagery in another Old English prose text preceding *Beowulf* in Cotton Vitellius A.xv, and of the Anglo-Latin *Liber monstrorum*, to the words of *Beowulf* (especially the noun *nið*), and then further evidence for the presence of lunar and solar myth in Old Norse texts. The penultimate section offers further thoughts on the relationship of the monsters of the Danish mere, and their decapitation, to imagery of the moon’s waning. Finally, I address the possible symbolic significance of Beowulf’s return to Heorot bearing the head of Grendel and the hilt of the giant sword.

The quantity of comparative evidence adduced in this chapter and preceding ones, some of which is obscure but coherent, together with the lack of obvious dependency of many of the cited sources upon each other, suggests the likelihood of widespread early traditions about giants and giantesses associated with the moon. If accepted, this finding is likely to enrich our understanding of the nocturnal giants of *Beowulf* and their temporary possession of, and ultimate defeat by, a giant sun-like sword.

Trees of Sun and Moon, and a Monster Called *Quasi Caput Luna*

Anglo-Saxons who came to *Beowulf* after reading or listening to the preceding texts in Cotton Vitellius A.xv would do so primed for solar and lunar marvels. Even if they had forgotten the Lakes of the Sun and Moon in *Wonders*, fresh in their memory would be the solar and lunar imagery at the end of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, the prose text which comes immediately before *Beowulf* and which was transcribed by the same scribe who wrote the preceding texts of the *Passion of St Christopher* and *Wonders* and the first 1,939 lines of *Beowulf* itself.¹ For the Old English *Letter*, a translation of the Latin *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*, concludes with a long passage concerning the oracular Trees of the Sun (male) and Moon (female). Not only that, but such Anglo-Saxons would probably recall the unusual detail that these trees wept greatly during eclipses for *þon hie ondredon þæt hie heora godmægne sceoldon beon benumene* ‘because they feared that they would be deprived of their divine power’.²

Beowulf has no equivalent pair of trees.³ Nevertheless, the concern of the solar and lunar trees about the loss of divine power during eclipses represents, I believe, a thematic parallel to the basis of at least the middle section of *Beowulf* in mythological traditions about the sun’s recovery of light which had been stolen or arrogated by the moon. The possibility that this parallel is significant is strengthened by the presence of another likely correspondence found earlier in the *Letter*’s description of a certain *deor* ‘beast’:

Ða wæs þæt lond eall swa we geferdon adrugad ond fen, ond cannon ond hreod weoxan. Ða cwom þær semninga sum deor of þæm fenne ond of ðæm fæstene. Wæs þæm deore eall se hrycg acæglod swelce snoda. Hæfde þæt deor seonowealt heafod swelce mona, ond þæt deor hatte *Quasi Caput Luna*, ond him wæron þa breost gelice niccres breastum, ond heardum toðum ond

1 On links between the *Letter* and *Beowulf*, including a continuity of heroic theme and similarities of wording between the end of the former and the start of the latter, see Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 25–39; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 139; Frank, ‘Scandal’, 862.

2 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 246–53, with quotation at 248.

3 Note, however, the frosty trees that overhang Grendel’s mere in misty gloom beneath weeping skies (*Beowulf* 1363–4, 1375–6); cf. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 45.

miclum hit wæs gegyred ond geteþed. Ond hit þa þæt deor ofsloh mine þegnas twegen. Ond we þa þæt deor nowþer ne mid spere gewundigan ne meahte ne mid nænige wæpne, ac we hit uneaþe mid isernum hamerum ond slecgum gefyldon ond hit ofbeoton.⁴

Then all the land we [i.e., Alexander the Great and his men] came to was dried up and fen, and canes and reeds grew there. Then there came suddenly a certain beast from the fen and from the fastness. The beast's back was all studded like a snood; the beast had a round/concave head like the moon, and the beast was called *Quasi Caput Luna* 'Head Like the Moon', and its breasts were like the breasts of a *nicor*, and with hard and large teeth it was equipped and toothed. And it, that beast, then killed two of my thanes. And then by no means could we wound the beast with spear or with any weapon, but with difficulty we felled it with iron hammers and mallets and beat it to death.

The description of this bizarre monster (originally apparently a crocodile) by the Old English translator, whose precise Latin source has apparently not survived,⁵ is suggestive of Grendel and his mother. They similarly came from fen and fastness, and were associated with

4 Adapted from Fulk, *Beowulf Manuscript*, 64.

5 The Latin source presumably included the words *quasi caput luna*, which seem not to appear in any extant version of the *Epistola*. The relevant passage from the published text in Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 214, reads as follows (with my translation):

(§27) Palus erat sicca et canna habundans. Per quam cum transitum temptaremus, belua noui generis prosiliuit serrato tergo, duo capita habens, alterum lunae [*v.l.* leaenae] simile, hippotamo pectore, corcodrilli gerens alterum simillimum duris munitum dentibus, quod caput duos milites repentino occidit ictu. Quam ferreis uix umquam comminuimus malleis, quam hostis non ualebamus transfigere. Ammirati diu nouitatem eius.

There was a dry swamp with abundant reeds. When we attempted to cross it, a new kind of beast leapt forward with a serrated back. It had two heads, one like the moon [*v.l.* a lioness], with hippopotamus breast, the other appearing just like a crocodile's fortified with hard teeth, which head killed two soldiers in a sudden strike. We just about crushed with iron hammers what we could not transfix with spears [reading *hastis* for *hostis*]. We wondered at its strangeness for a long time.

See further, *ibid.*, 127, including the observation that several manuscripts of the *Epistola* do not state that the beast had two heads. For a later English translation of the *Epistola*, in which the beast again has two heads (*that oon like to the moone, with a short brest of a cocodril beryng; that other harneised and arraied with the most hardest teeth*), see V. DiMarco and L. Perelman, *The Middle English Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (Amsterdam, 1978), 82, 84; the editors consider the Latin reading *leanae* 'lioness' to be 'more comprehensible' than *lunae* 'moon' (161).

more than one *nicor* 'sea/water-monster', their mere being home to such creatures. Grendel and his mother were also monsters (surely powerfully toothed) who killed thanes. And they could not be wounded by conventional piercing weapons (although neither was beaten to death). As Andy Orchard has observed, such correspondences between *Beowulf* and the *Letter* probably arise because the translator of the Latin *Epistola* 'knew the poem [i.e., *Beowulf*] at first hand, and consciously developed hints in his original text in a way which deliberately drew on aspects of *Beowulf*'.⁶

The *Beowulf*-poet surrounds Grendel and his mother with an aura of terror partly by being vague about their overall physical appearance but alarmingly precise about specific details, such as Grendel's horrific claw and horribly illuminated eyes.⁷ How Anglo-Saxons may have imagined Grendel and his mother to look outside *Beowulf* (assuming references to a certain Grendel in place-names do not wholly derive from the poem) we do not know. But we can say that, in lieu of a precise description of the physical form of Grendel and his mother in *Beowulf*, attentive listeners who knew of *Quasi Caput Luna* would be encouraged to imagine him or her (or both) having a head like the moon, if they did not already. Possibly this head would be large, round, pale, cratered and sometimes bloody, but, as both Grendel and his dam were devils (*deofla* 1680), it might also have borne horns shaped like a crescent moon;⁸ the two possibilities are not, of course, mutually exclusive because the moon waxes and wanes. It will be recalled, however, that *Riddle 29* describes its Grendel-like moon-creature, which bears pilfered sunlight on its head, as horned (a crescent moon), and implicitly identifies it with the Devil, a link corroborated by other Christian writings.⁹ Grendel and his mother,

6 Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 35.

7 See further, Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology'.

8 The horned devil was certainly known in late Anglo-Saxon England, as shown by the image of Satan-Mors in the *Leofric Missal*; see Murphy, *Unriddling*, 128, n. 58. See also T. Bergsma, 'Images and Words: Devils and Demons in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts' (unpublished masters thesis, University of Groningen, 2008), figs. 1, 22, 26, 33, 36, 37, <http://arts.studenttheses.uib.rug.nl/9076/1/Ma-1254782-T.Bergsma.pdf>; R. Abbott, 'Some Recently Discovered Anglo-Saxon Carvings at Breedon-on-the-Hill', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* 39 (1963), 20–3, pl. I(b). Below, I raise the possibility that Grendel also had moon-like eyes.

9 See Murphy, *Unriddling*, 127–9.

furthermore, descended from Cain, who was horned in Hebrew tradition and medieval Europe,¹⁰ and who, in later medieval tradition at least, was identified as the Man in the Moon.¹¹

That at least one Anglo-Saxon considered the *Epistola's* moon-like-headed beast to be horned is shown by the *Liber monstrorum*, whose anonymous author may well have been 'a contemporary—perhaps a colleague or disciple—of Aldhelm [d. 709 or 710]'.¹² This work is often cited in connection with *Beowulf* because of the reference in its first book, in a passage on *monstra mirae magnitudinis* 'monsters of marvellous size', to King Higlacus (*Beowulf's* Hygelac).¹³ We learn that, from the age of twelve, Higlacus was too big for a horse (in the Old English poem his nephew Beowulf never rides either); that he was killed by the Franks (a demise also mentioned in *Beowulf*); and that his bones were displayed on an island in the Rhine. This evidence that the two texts have common interests reinforces the significance of other parallels from the second book.

The *Liber monstrorum's* passage about the beast with the moon-like head, which is evidently based on a different version of the *Epistola*, reads as follows (2.22):

Ferunt et in India beluam fuisse quae habuit bina capita, alterum lunae bicornis ut puta imaginem, alterum corcodrilli gerebat. Et tergo serrato [*v.l.* ferrato] et saevis armata dentibus quondam in Alexandri milites prosiliens duos occidisse describitur.¹⁴

And they say that in India there was a beast which had two heads, one bearing the image of a two-horned moon (believe it!), the other of a crocodile. And armed with serrated [*v.l.* iron-covered] back and savage teeth, it is described as once having rushed forward and killed two soldiers of Alexander.

10 J. L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998), 737; R. Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, 1981), 63, pl. 7, 8; Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 73. According to a probably eighth-century Irish or Irish-influenced Bible commentary, some people say *quod in similitudine cerui occisus est* 'that he [i.e., Cain] was killed in the likeness of a stag'; G. MacGinty (ed.), *The Reference Bible, Das Bibelwerk inter pauca problemsmata de enigmatibus ex tomis canonicis nunc prompta sunt praefatio et libri de Pentateucho Moysi* (Turnhout, 2000), 99.

11 Emerson, 'Legends', 840–5; E. Reiss, 'Chaucer's Friar and the Man in the Moon', *JEGP* 62 (1963), 481–5.

12 Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm', 296.

13 Lapidge, 'Beowulf, Aldhelm', 282–7, 296–8; Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 258–9.

14 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 300–1.

Although by itself this parallel is not immediately suggestive of Grendel, other tantalizing indications of common ground with *Beowulf* become apparent from surrounding passages. Thus, the subjects of sections 19 to 28 of the *Liber monstrorum*'s second book run as follows:¹⁵

- 2.19: Dogs with the hind parts of fish in the Mediterranean Sea; Scylla, the monster surrounded by sea-dogs, who destroyed Ulysses' ship. (Compare Grendel's mother as *brimwylf* in the sea-like mere, and the mere-monsters' likely attacks on ships in *Beowulf* 1425–30.)
- 2.20: Nocturnal beasts, or rather *dira prodigia* 'dire prodigies/wonders', which assume the form of other beasts when pursued. (Compare the nocturnal Grendel as a *wiht unhælo* 'creature of ill-omen' 120, and his sketchily defined mother.)
- 2.21: The Nile's production of all kinds of monsters. (Compare the water-monsters of Grendel's mere.)
- 2.22: The monster with a moon-like head. (Compare Grendel.)
- 2.23: A beast so venomous that its blood melts the cutting edges of an iron weapon. This passage, for which there is no known source, merits quotation as a significant parallel to the melting of the giant sword in giant-blood:

Bestia autem illa inter omnes beluas dirissima fertur, in qua tantam ueneni copiam adfirmant ut eam sibi leones quamuis inualidioris feram corporis, timeant, et tantam uim eius uenenum habere arbitrantur, ut eo licet ferri acies intincta liquescat.¹⁶

But that beast is considered among the direst of all wild animals in which, they assert, there is such an abundance of venom that lions fear it, although it is a beast of weaker body, and they judge that its venom has such strength that it melts the sharp edges of an iron weapon/sword that is steeped in it.

15 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 298–301. For other parallels and discussion, see *ibid.*, 86–115.

16 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 300.

- 2.24: By the Euphrates, an antelope that has long horns in the shape of a saw, with which it cuts down huge oak trees. (A distortion of stags' rubbing of their pronged antlers on trees to remove the covering velvet; compare *Beowulf's* strong-antlered stag which flees to a wood and would rather die on the mere's shore than enter its waters.)
- 2.25: Crocodiles that sun themselves on the banks of the Nile, but also frequent the water and attack passing people. (Compare the water-monsters that lie on the mere's headlands and swim dangerously in its waters in *Beowulf* 1425–30.)
- 2.26: The intolerable *balena* 'whale'. (Compare Grendel's mother as a monstrous fish, an image I discuss in Chapter 15.)
- 2.27: The Ganges' production of gold, precious stones and monstrous races. (Compare the monstrous creatures of the mere and the treasures therein, which included the gold-hilted giant sword.)
- 2.28: Two-footed horses, with equine front and piscine rear, in the Mediterranean. (Compare the likely equine aspect of the monsters called *nicoras* in the mere;¹⁷ also Vargeisa as a partly equine *finngálkn* comparable to Grendel's mother.)

Clearly, these parallels are imprecise, and individually they might be dismissed as insignificant. But their consecutive nature and collective number, to which other nonconsecutive similarities might be added, strengthens the belief that there is a relationship between the *Liber monstorum* and the parts of *Beowulf* focused on the mere and its creatures, even if that relationship cannot be defined precisely.

Aside from the parallel with *Quasi Caput Luna*, other aspects of Grendel and his mother are compatible with a lunar nature. Most obviously, both giants attack only by night. Both have a lupine aspect or lupine connections, which could link them to the implicitly lunar wolves imagined to devour the sun (and therefore in at least some cases identified with the eclipsing dark moon), according to Norse traditions we examined earlier. Both were also thieves, whose activities

¹⁷ See Chapter 3 n. 33; OED s.v. *nicker* n.¹

the moon traditionally oversaw.¹⁸ And on his last and most famous visit to Heorot, Grendel is described as *scriðan* (703),¹⁹ a verb meaning ‘gliding’, ‘creeping’, ‘wandering’ which can also describe the gliding motion of (among other things) heavenly bodies.²⁰ Below I examine further evidence pointing to these giants’ lunar connections. It includes indications of the likely equivalence of Grendel and *Völuspá*’s lunar pitchforker, and of these monsters’ mothers.²¹

Grendel the *Wan*

Grendel is a creature of the night. He attacked Heorot at night, at least once in the *uhta* (or *uhte*), the hour of darkness before dawn, this being the deepest part of the night. Thus, early in the poem we hear that after Grendel had attacked Heorot, *Ða wæs on uhtan mid ærdæge / Grendles guðcræft gumum undyrne* (125–6), a passage that might be inelegantly translated as ‘Then at the juncture of the last hour of darkness with dawn Grendel’s battle-strength was unsecret [i.e., revealed] to men’; more clearly, Beowulf fought and dismembered Grendel in *uhthelm þone* ‘the hour-before-dawn uproar/crash’ (2007).²² As one scholar has recently observed, Grendel’s identification with darkness and its forces is ‘so fundamental to his character that it is often taken for granted in analysis of *Beowulf*’.²³ It should not be, however, because Grendel may

18 Cf. *OED* s.v. ‘moon-man’ 1: ‘One whose occupation is pursued by moonlight; a “night-walker”; one who robs by night’; Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I* (1.2): ‘the fortune of us that are the moon’s men doth ebb and flow like the sea, being governed, as the sea is, by the moon. As, for proof, now: a purse of gold most resolutely snatched on *Monday* night ...’ (my emphasis).

19 Cf. *Beowulf* 163, 650, 2569 (of the dragon in the last instance). Cf. also the creeping motion of the crocodile which lies behind *Quasi Caput Luna*.

20 See *BT* s.v. *scriðan* III; cf. *scriðe* ‘course, orbit’.

21 Although evidence of the belief that wolves howl at the moon appears lacking from medieval Europe, of interest for the interpretation of the troll-man Grendel is the belief that humans change into wolves according to the moon’s phases. This is explicit in an early thirteenth-century English text, Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia Imperialia* ‘Recreation for an Emperor’; see A. Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2006), 178. See also Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Norse Studies*, 144–7 on the possibly moon-influenced transformation of a trollish man called *Kveld-Úlfr* ‘Evening Wolf’ in *Egils saga Skallagrímsonar*.

22 Comparably, the nocturnal dragon which Beowulf later fights is an *uhtsceaða* ‘uht-predator’ (2271) and an *uhtfloga* ‘uht-flier’ (2760). On OE *uhta/uhte, uht-*, see F. Tupper, Jr., ‘Anglo-Saxon *dæg-mæl*’, *PMLA* 10 (1895), 111–241 at 146–9.

23 S. Harlan-Haughey, ‘The Burning Sun: Landscape and Knowledge in *Exodus*’, *AbūG* 69 (2012), 97–117 at 108.

well be linked especially with the moon's waning and dark phases, which were widely considered times for wicked deeds.²⁴

Grendel is introduced as a tormented creature who dwelt *in bystrum* 'in darkness' (*Beowulf* 87) within earshot of Heorot. From there he heard the hall-poet's account of the Creation, including *sunnan ond monan, / leoman to leohte landbuendum* 'of the sun and the moon, luminaries as light for land-dwellers' (94–5), which inspired him to attack with presumably jealous rage. Although this passage contains the only instance of the noun *mona* 'moon' in *Beowulf*, this need not indicate, as Herbert G. Wright claims, that 'the moon can play no part as a background to the first half of the poem'.²⁵ For the moon appears regularly absent, failing to appear for two or three days during the dark phase of its cycle, between its waning and waxing. As Godfrid Storms observes: 'It is not too difficult to imagine the impact on the Anglo-Saxon audience of a monster prowling about their dwellings on a moonless night, when every rustling sound outside represented unknown dangers.'²⁶ Furthermore, it is important to recognize that it is a dark moon (now called a 'new moon') that we see during solar eclipses, when it appears as a sinister black silhouette crossing the sun.²⁷ At such times, the moon has often been imagined as a monster devouring the sun, as in the case of myths examined earlier.²⁸ In an annular solar eclipse, furthermore, the dark moon is surrounded

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- 24 M. Leach and J. Fried (ed.), *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (San Francisco, 1972, rpt. 1984), 744. A scientific study of lions finds that they attack most often when the moon is waning, and the same may be the case with other predators, such as wolves: see 'Maneaters Most Likely to Strike after Full Moon', *The Guardian* (20 July 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2011/jul/20/lion-attacks-on-humans-moon>. Additionally, Grendel might preserve a memory of the worldwide dust veil that dimmed the sun for years following a meteor strike or immense volcanic eruption in 536; for this event and its possible inspiration of *Fimbulvetr*, the 'Mighty Winter' which precedes Ragnarök, and even (in Bo Gräslund's view) of the main monsters of *Beowulf*, see André, *Tracing*, 178–85; Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*.
- 25 H. G. Wright, 'Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in *Beowulf*', *RES* 8 (1957), 1–11 at 5.
- 26 G. Storms, 'Grendel the Terrible', *NM* 73 (1972), 427–36 at 433. Neither, however, is this imagining wholly straightforward, as 'The experience of absolute darkness, unlit by any artificial means, is one of the many human experiences that urbanization has made increasingly rare for most of us'; E. J. Sharpe, 'The Old English Runic Paternoster', in H. R. E. Davidson (ed.), *Symbols of Power* (Cambridge, 1973), 41–60 at 41.
- 27 This fact was known to Bede; see Wallis, *Bede*, 80. It was first firmly established very much earlier, in seventh-century BC Mesopotamia; see Panchenko, 'Solar Light', 22.
- 28 See also Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, I, 329–35.

by a flickering ring suggestive of the dark 'flicker-flame' through which Skírnir rode to meet Gerðr.²⁹

A *deorc deapscua* 'dark death-shadow' (160), Grendel not only dwelt in darkness but attacked in darkness, as one of the *scaduhelma gesceapu* 'shapes/creatures of shadow-helms [i.e., dark nights or the cover of such]' (650). Similarly, as noted earlier, he inhabited Heorot *sweartum nihtum* 'on dark nights' (167). There are no darker nights than those of a dark moon, especially when the stars are obscured, as they surely would be above Grendel's cloudy, misty mere. What is more, late Anglo-Saxon tradition records that nights of the waning moon are representative and reflective of man's mortality and the world's decline;³⁰ the Danes of Heorot, demoralized by and helpless to prevent Grendel's attacks, may well have agreed.

A link between Grendel and the moon's waning may lie behind the repeated association of him, his actions and his environs with *wan(n)/won(n)* 'dark', 'black', 'lacking light', which also appears in the poem as a negative prefix.³¹ Even if this word is not securely relatable to the verb *wanian* 'to wane, dwindle',³² which, then as now, could describe

29 Cf. E. G. Suhr, *The Mask, the Unicorn and the Messiah: A Study in Solar Eclipse Symbolism* (New York, 1970), 165: 'the moon was ... the island surrounded by flame. Only the hero could penetrate beyond the water or fire.' Cf. too the fire on, or in, Grendel's mere, though it occurred only by night.

30 E.g., R. Morris (ed.), *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century*, EETS o.s. 58, 63, 73 (London, 1880), 17: *þonne se mona wanað, þonne tacnað he ure deaplicnesse, & þisse worlde wanunge* 'When the moon wanes, then it betokens our mortality, and the waning of this world'; Blake, *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*, 78: *Seo is ... wanigende þurh forðfarendum* 'It [i.e., the moon] is ... waning on account of those passing away'; see also Thorpe, *Homilies*, I, 154; additionally *ibid.*, 102 for the belief that all earthly creatures are *fulre and mægenfaestre on fullum monan þonne on gewanedum* 'fuller and stronger in a full moon than in a waned (moon)'. Cf. in stanza 12 of the Old Norse Eddic poem *Guðrúnarkviða II* 'The Second Lay of Guðrún', Guðrún's reflection upon her grief for her dead husband: '*Nótt þótti mér niðmyrkr vera, / er ek sárla satk yfir Sigurði*' "'Night seemed to me to be new-moon dark, when I sat sorrowfully over Sigurðr.'"

31 It is also noteworthy that the presence of clouds and disturbed air above Grendel's mere (1373–6), and the surging of the mere before Beowulf beholds Grendel and his mother, correspond closely to what Bede tells us about the power of the new moon; see Wallis, *Bede*, 81–2. *Tiddy Mun*, a late Lincolnshire folk-tale concerning a guardian spirit of the marshes records that 'Whan tha year wor geyan wet, and tha watter rose i' tha marshes, while it creepit up to the door-sill, an' covered tha pads, come tha fust New Moon'; M. C. Balfour, 'Legends of the Cars', *Folklore* 2 (1891), 145–70 at 151.

32 See *OED* s.v. 'wan', *a*. The remaining instances in *Beowulf* are *se wonna hrefn* 'the dark raven' (3024) and the flame that will grow *wonna* on the hero's pyre (3115). With *wanian* 'to wane' (with long root vowel), compare also *wannian* 'to become dark' (with short root vowel), though the latter is not found in *Beowulf*.

the moon's gradual diminution,³³ given the homophony and context, it may hint at the lunar wane and perhaps at the moon's 'want, lack' (*wana*) of light.³⁴ Grendel is introduced as a *wonsæli wer* 'unfortunate man' (105), a descendant of Cain after the murder of Abel;³⁵ his nocturnal predations were the *wonsceaft wera* 'misery of men' (120);³⁶ he scorned to use weapons out of *wonhydum* 'recklessness' (434); he was among the creatures of the night who advanced *wan under wolcnum* 'dark under clouds' (651); he *com on wanre niht* 'came in the dark night' (702); and a wave ascended from his mere *won to wolcnum* 'dark to the clouds' (1374).

Grendel also had the ability to *wanian* 'wane', at least in the transitive sense of diminishing the inhabitants of Heorot and, implicitly therewith, that hall's light and happiness — as does the dark moon to the sun during a solar eclipse. The verb *wanian* appears three times in *Beowulf*. In the first instance, Hroðgar laments to Beowulf:

'Sorh is me to secganne on sefan minum
gumena ængum hwæt me Grendel hafað
hynðo on Heorote mid his heteþancum,
færniða gefremed; is min fletwerod,
wigheap gewanod.' (473–7)

'It is a sorrow to me in my heart to say to any man what humiliation Grendel has inflicted on me in Heorot with his hateful thoughts, (what) sudden/terrible attacks [with a pun on 'dark moons/moon-darknesses(?)];³⁷ my hall-troop, (my) battle-heap is waned.'³⁸

33 *BT* s.v. *wanian* II *intrans.* (I a); *OED* s.v. 'wane' *v.*

34 *OED* does not, however, attest the noun 'wane' (from OE *wana/wona*) in connection with the moon until the mid-sixteenth century.

35 According to a probably ninth-century Irish text, *In tenga bithnua* 'The Ever-New Tongue', Cain murdered Abel at midnight; see J. Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings*, rev. edn. (Dublin, 2000), 93. In Chapter 16 I note a tradition that the moon's radiance waned as a result.

36 The noun *wonsceaft* might be interpreted literally as 'dark shaft' or 'dark creation'. As the context relates to warriors sleeping in Heorot, unaware of Grendel's approach, the former possibility anticipates Hroðgar's reflection on the attack of a demon with a *stræl* 'arrow, shaft' when the guardian of the soul sleeps (1741–7). As such, Grendel's dark (lunar?) shaft may contrast with the radiant solar staves which destroy monsters such as the dwarf *Alvíss* and the giantess *Hrímgerðr* in Old Norse texts (see Chapter 13).

37 See below.

38 See also my discussion of the link between ON *nið* 'dark moon' and humiliation below.

The postponement of *gewanod* 'waned' in this passage gives it emphasis.

Later, Hroðgar similarly recalls that Grendel *to lange leode mine / wanode ond wyrde* 'for too long waned and destroyed my people' (1336–7). The third instance of *wanian* we have already seen describing the melting of the giant-sword (1607), and I shall return to it in Chapter 16. These uses of the verb may reflect a lunar aspect to Grendel and his mother, who, I believe, sought to diminish the sun's light.

Grendel's association with *wan* may also inform puns. It may be no coincidence that in persecuting Heorot and its inhabitants he *wið rihte wan* 'fought against right' (144), or that he *wan / hwile wið Hroþgar* 'fought for a time against Hroðgar' (151–2). In both cases *wan* is obviously the past tense of *winnan* 'to fight', but may pun on the adjective *wan* 'dark'. Also, when held fast by the arm in Beowulf's grip, Grendel is heard *sar wanigean* 'bewailing (his) pain/wound' (787). Here the verb *wani(ge)an* (with long root vowel) may pun on *wanian* 'to wane, diminish' (with short root vowel). Of course, 'the pain/wound diminishing' is precisely the *opposite* of what is actually happening in a direct, physical sense, but we may also detect a subtle anticipation of Grendel's dismemberment as an image of the lunar wane, of the moon's 'dying' (see later in this chapter).³⁹ This suggestion is encouraged by Beowulf's likely description of how *hyne sar hafað / in niðgripe nearwe befonen* 'the pain/wound has him [i.e., Grendel] narrowly/darkly(?) encompassed in a hostile/dark-moon(?) grip' (975–6; again, see below). If there is a hint of Grendel's 'waning' as he loses his arm, his 'un/bad-sword(?)', then we may have an implicit parallel to the subsequent loss by 'waning' of the blade of the giant sword which serves as an extension of Beowulf's sword-arm.

Were *Beowulf* to contain more direct lexical references to the moon's waning or dark phases, the proposed association of Grendel (and, we shall find, his mother and the climactic dragon) with the waning or dark moon would be strengthened. This may indeed be the case, as I have just indicated in the queried translations of *færniða* as 'sudden/terrible dark

39 Note the recurrence of *sar* 'wound, pain' in line 975 in connection with Grendel's arm-loss. According to a homily by Ælfric on the passion of Simon and Jude, the apostles commanded devils inhabiting idols of the sun and moon to come out and break those idols and the associated chariots. At once, two black Ethiopians emerged from the idols (presumably one from each), broke them to pieces *and mid wanunge awege flugon* 'and with waning flew away'; Thorpe, *Homilies*, II, 496–7.

moons/moon-darknesses(?)' and *niðgripe* as 'dark-moon(?) grip'. As we saw earlier in this study, Old Norse has a specific word for the waning or dark moon: *nið*. This noun is attested both as a simplex and as the first element of compounds, including mythological personal names and toponyms. It may well be related to the Old Norse adverb *niðr* 'down', 'beneath' and OE *niðer*.⁴⁰ Since the darkness of night ensues when the sun passes below the horizon, it was perhaps thought that when the moon was apparently absent from the sky on a cloudless night, it too was *beneath* the ground. Before examining the possible evidence for a cognate OE *nið* 'waning/dark moon' in *Beowulf*, I shall substantiate the belief that the waned moon was indeed 'down', 'beneath' (and dead) by reference to two (admittedly very late) texts. In the first, the dark, dead, dissected moon resides in the Underworld. In the second, which displays some remarkable similarities to *Beowulf*, the dark, dead moon is drawn by monsters deep into a boggy pool.

Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tale 175: *Der Mond* 'The Moon'

This story tells how, in ancient days, four young men from a land of darkness travelled to a land where the glowing moon stood on an oak tree.⁴¹ Having pulled the moon down on a rope, they covered it with a cloth and took it away in a horse-drawn waggon. They set it up on an oak tree in their own land, to the delight of the local people and of dwarves and elves. The young men oiled the moon and tended to its 'wick', but one by one they aged and died. After each passed away, a quarter of the moon was cut off and buried with the deceased, until nothing was left of it and the old darkness returned.

But down in *der Unterwelt* 'the Underworld', the four quarters of moon were reassembled, to the delight of the dead. They made merry, danced and went to taverns, where they got drunk and fought to the extent that the noise reached heaven. St. Peter, fearing that the Devil and his followers were about to storm Heaven, called the heavenly host to

40 Sturtevant, 'Irregularities', 85 identifies ON *nið* 'the waning moon' as probably a substantivized form of 'an adjective **niðr* "down" (cf. the adverb *niðr*).' Note also EDD s.v. *nithered* 'withered, wasted, feeble'.

41 G. Jürgensmeier (ed.), *Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm: Kinder- und Hausmärchen* ([n.p.], 1857), 645–7, http://www.gasl.org/refbib/Grimm_Maerchen.pdf; J. Zipes (trans.), *Brothers Grimm: The Complete Fairy Tales* (London, 2007), 684–6.

arms. But in the end, as no revolt came, he rode to the Underworld alone, quieted the dead, took the moon away and hung it back up in the sky.

The Dead Moon, a Blickling Homily and Beowulf

Evidence for such a belief also survives in a highly evocative Lincolnshire folk-tale, *The Dead Moon*.⁴² Although not recorded until the nineteenth century, it merits detailed attention because it may well reflect earlier traditions about the submergence of the moon, not just below the horizon, but specifically in a marsh. As may not have been noticed before, there is even reason to detect a distant kinship between this tale and *Beowulf*.

In contrast to most of the stories examined in this book, *The Dead Moon* characterizes the moon as wholly benevolent. It starts by recording how her light enabled people to traverse ‘bog-pads’ safely.⁴³ Sometimes, however, she failed to shine and then:

oot cam’ a tha Things ‘at dool I’ tha Darkness, an’ want about seekin’ to do evil
an’ harm to all as worna safe beside ther ain he’arths. Harm an’ mischance an’
mischief: Bogles, an’ de’ad Things, an’ crawlin’ Horrors: tha a’ coomed oot o’
noights when the moon didna shine.⁴⁴

The kindly Moon went to see for herself what went on behind her back. At the end of the month, she donned ‘a black cloak, an’ a black hood o’wer her yaller shinin’ hair’, and went to the edge of the bog. Looking about her she saw ‘watter here, an’ watter there’, and ‘wavin’ tussocks, an’ trem’lin’ mools, an’ gra’at black snags [i.e., bog-blackened tree-trunks or branches] a’ twisted and bent’.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, on she went into the middle of the marsh. There ‘witches girmed as tha rode past on ther gra’at black cats; an’ tha evil Eye glowered fro’ tha da’arkest corners—an’ tha will-o’-tha-wykes danced a’ about wi’ther lanterns swingin’ o’ ther backs.’ Dead folk rose in the

42 Balfour, ‘Legends’, 156–64; also, for an abridged version adapted to standard modern English, see K. M. Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language incorporating the F. J. Norton Collection* (London, 1970–71), Part A, I, 206–8. The folk-tale appears a likely inspiration for J. R. R. Tolkien’s account of the Dead Marshes in *The Lord of the Rings*. Cf. MIFL, motif A754 ‘Moon kept in box’.

43 Balfour, ‘Legends’, 157.

44 Balfour, ‘Legends’, 157.

45 Balfour, ‘Legends’, 157.

water with 'hell fire i' ther empty een-holes' and 'tha slimy drippin' De'ad Han's slithered about, beckonin' an' p'intin''. Undeterred, the Moon pressed on between 'greedy gurglin' watter ho'als' until she came 'nigh a big black pool'. There she slipped and would have tumbled into the water, had she not 'grabbed wi' bo'oth han's at a snag near by, to steady 'asel' wi'; but so cum as she touched it, a twined itsel' round her wrists loike a pa'ir o' han'cuffs, an' gript her so 's she culdna move.' And there she stayed, a prisoner of 'the Black Snag', with no help in sight—only 'shiftin' flurryin' evil Things, comin' an' goin' here an' there busy wi' ther ain ill wark.'⁴⁶

Then the Moon heard a man calling pitifully to God and Mary for help. He had strayed into the bog and was similarly snatching at branches in a desperate bid to escape. But the bog-creatures mocked and grasped at him as the 'fause lights' of 'will o' tha wykes' led him further astray.⁴⁷ The bog-horrors that attacked him took 'a' sorts o' shapes', such as bright-eyed girls who stretched out helping hands, which, when grasped, turned into 'slimy things an' shapeless worms'.⁴⁸ They whispered to him his life's evil deeds and thoughts, shouted out his heart's secrets, and danced as they scorned him.

The Moon was alarmed when she saw the man approaching 'tha deadly quicks'.⁴⁹ Although she could not free herself, in her struggle her black hood fell back, so that her shining yellow hair fell to the waters below. Its light drove away the darkness and enabled the man to find his way out of the bog. The Moon wanted to go with him, but as frantically as she struggled, she could not free herself. Exhausted, she lay down, and despite her best efforts, her hood covered her head again. The darkness returned and this time the bog-monsters came for her. They mocked and snatched at her, and argued about whether to poison, strangle, smother or bury her, until dawn approached. Then they caught hold of her and 'laid her deep i' tha watter at fut o' tha snag', with a 'stra'ange big sto'an' on top of her to prevent her from rising.⁵⁰ They meant to return that night to have their way with her, so they also appointed two 'will o' tha wykes' to watch over her till

46 Balfour, 'Legends', 158.

47 Balfour, 'Legends', 158–9.

48 Balfour, 'Legends', 159.

49 Balfour, 'Legends', 159.

50 Balfour, 'Legends', 161.

then. And 'thur lay tha poor moon, de'ad an' buried i' tha bog',⁵¹ until someone would free her.

Days passed and the time came for the moon to reappear. But she did not. The nights 'wor aye da'ark, an' th' Evil Things wor badder nor iver'.⁵² No one could travel safely and the bog-monsters even 'crept an' wailed roon' tha hooses an' keekit in at the winders, an' sneepit at tha latches, till tha poor bodies mun ke'p lights a' night, else tha horrors 'd a coomed ower tha varry doorsils'.⁵³

Many of the scared people went to 'the wise woman wha doolt i' th' 'owd mill, an' axed ef so be 's tha could fin' oot wheer tha moon wor ga'an'.⁵⁴ She consulted her 'brewpot', her mirror and the Bible, but said she could not tell where the Moon was at present. She urged them to tell her if they heard anything more, however. More days passed, until one day at the local inn the man whom the Moon had rescued from the bog recalled his adventure. They told the wise woman of the mill. Again, she said it was too dark for her to tell, but instructed them how to find out for themselves what had happened to the Moon:

'Go'a all on ye, just afwore the night gathers, pit a sto'on i' yer gobs, an' tak' a hazel twig i' yer han's, an' say ne'er a word till yer safe ho'am age'an. Than wa'alk on an' fear nowt, fair into tha mid' o' tha ma'ash, till ye fin' a coffin, a can'le, an' a cross. Than ye 'll no be far frae yer moon; look, and mappen ye 'll fin'.⁵⁵

They set out the next night for the middle of the bog as she had instructed. On they went until they stopped, amazed:

fur theer wor tha gra'at sto'an, half in, half oot, o' tha watter, fur a' th' warl' loike a stra'ange big coffin; an' at tha he'ad wor tha black snag, stretchin' oot's twae arms in a dark grewsome cross; an' on it a tiddy light flickered, like a deein' can'le. An' tha a' knelt down i' tha muck, an' crossed thersel's, an' said, "Our Lord", fu'st for'ard 'cause o' tha cross, an' then back'ard, to ke'p off tha Bogles; but wi'oot sp'akin' out, fur tha kenned as tha Evil Things 'd catch 'em, ef tha didna do as tha wise woman tellt 'em.⁵⁶

51 Balfour, 'Legends', 161.

52 Balfour, 'Legends', 162.

53 Balfour, 'Legends', 162.

54 Balfour, 'Legends', 162.

55 Balfour, 'Legends', 163.

56 Balfour, 'Legends', 163–4.

The people removed the stone and afterwards said that:

fur wan tiddy minute, tha seed a stra'ange an' beautiful fa'ace lookin' oop at 'em glad loike oot o' tha black watter; but tha light coomed so quick 'an so white an' shinin', 'at tha stept ba'ack mazed wi' it, an' wi' tha gre'at angry wail as coomed fro' tha fleein' Horrors; an' tha varry nex' minute, when they could see age'an, theer wor tha full moon i' tha sky, bright an' beautiful an' kin' 's 'iver, shinin' an' smilin' doun at 'em, an' makin' tha bogs an' tha pads as clear as da'ay, an' stealin' into tha varry corners, as thoff she'd ha' druv tha darkness an' tha Bogles clean awa'ay ef a could.⁵⁷

And ever since 'tha moon shines brighter 'n clearer ower tha Bogs than ither wheers'.⁵⁸

Several peculiar aspects of this story find parallel almost a millennium earlier in a description of Hell contained in a collection of Anglo-Saxon homilies dated 971. The portrayal of Hell in *Blickling Homily 16 (17)*, which is inspired by that of the third-century *Visio Sancti Pauli* 'Vision of St. Paul',⁵⁹ records that:

Swa Sanctus Paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle wætero niðergewitað, & he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne harne stan; & wæron norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, & ðær wæron þystro-genipo, & under þæm stane wæs nicra eardung & wearga. & he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm is gean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne; & þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron, swa grædig wulf; & þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan. & betuh þæm clife on [better *ond*] ðæm wætre wæron swylce twelf mila, & ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras. Ðis ðonne wæron ða saula þa ðe her on worlde mid unrihte gefyrenode wæron, & ðæs noldan geswican ær heora lifes ende.⁶⁰

So Saint Paul was looking to the northern part of this world, where all waters go down, and he saw there over the water a certain hoar-stone; and north of that stone had grown very rimy woods, and there were dark mists, and

57 Balfour, 'Legends', 164.

58 Balfour, 'Legends', 164.

59 A fragmentary Old English translation of this text also survives; see A. di Paolo Healey (ed.), *The Old English Vision of St. Paul* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1978), with remarks on *Beowulf* and the *Blickling* homily on p. 52.

60 Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, 209, 211 (with my suggested emendation in brackets).

under that stone was a dwelling-place of water-monsters and *weargas*. And he saw that on that cliff, in the icy woods, there hung many black souls, bound by their hands; and the enemies/fiends of them were gripping (them) in the likeness of water-monsters, like a greedy wolf; and the water was black underneath that cliff. And between that cliff in [better 'and'] the water there were, as it were, twelve miles, and when the twigs broke, then the souls went down which hung on the twigs, and the water-monsters received them. These, then, were the souls of those who here in the world sinned with injustice and would not desist from it before their life's end.

There are obviously many differences, big and small, between the folk-tale and this passage, which is essentially a tableau, not a narrative. Most obvious is the prime importance of the Moon in the folk-tale, compared with the moon's absence from the homily,⁶¹ which therefore lacks anything to parallel the Moon's rescue of the man and the locals' rescue of her. There is also the contrast between the splendidly evoked bog of the folk-tale and the setting of the homily, although in the latter a bog may be implicit in the black water beneath the cliff. Nevertheless, the differences do not obscure a kernel of three peculiar and most specific similarities:

- (a) As, in the folk-tale, the dark Moon, which is to say the *black* Moon, is bound by her hands to a tree overhanging black water (as might also have happened to the sinful man, had the Moon not intervened), so, in the homily, the black souls are bound by their hands to twigs of trees overhanging black water.
- (b) As, in the folk-tale, the Moon and the sinful man are assailed from below by grasping water-devils in various forms, so, in the homily, souls are attacked from below by gripping fiends in the likeness of water-monsters. Furthermore, that OE *nicor* 'water-monster' came to mean 'siren' or 'mermaid' in Middle English encourages identification of the homily's monsters with the folk-tale's 'bright-eyed girls'.⁶²

61 Note, however, the teaching (noted earlier in this chapter) of an earlier homily in the same collection: *þonne se mona wanað, þonne tacnað he ure deaplicnesse* 'When the moon wanes, then it betokens our mortality'; Morris, *Blickling Homilies*, 17.

62 See OED s.v. *nicker*; MED s.v. *niker*.

- (c) As, in the folk tale, the Moon is buried beneath a big strange stone, so, in the homily, the black souls end up in water beneath a certain hoar-stone.⁶³

What makes these correspondences still more interesting is that, as has long been realized, the homily's description of St. Paul's vision of Hell displays strong verbal similarities to Hroðgar's description of Grendel's mere and its environs in *Beowulf* (1357–9, 1408–17).⁶⁴ The nature of the relationship between these Old English texts is uncertain; it has been variously argued that the homily was influenced by *Beowulf*, that the opposite is true, and, thirdly, that the similarities reflect shared use of a common vernacular source (now lost).⁶⁵ Although their precise relationship cannot be ascertained, a close connection between these two texts seems undeniable. The folk-tale, which, to my knowledge, has not been mentioned before in this connection, apparently also stands in some (chronologically distant) relationship to these texts, though it cannot be directly reliant on either. Even if the exact nature of its relationship to the Old English texts also remains undefinable, it seems similarly clear that there is one.

One thing we can discern more clearly is that the folk-tale shares certain similarities with *Beowulf* that are lacking in the homily (while the moon is a force for good in the folk tale, if present in *Beowulf* it constitutes a force for ill). Most obviously, the Lincolnshire bog meets its evocative match in the Danish fen with its dark, sucking water, perilous passage and 'fire on/in the flood', which is interpretable on one level as an apocalyptic sign, but also more humbly as a will-o'-the-wisp (or as the folk-tale has it, a 'will-o'-tha-wyke'). Furthermore, in both texts a heavenly light is concealed and then revealed in bog-water: in the folk-tale the dark moon, after her symbolic death, shines like the sun 'as clear as da'ay'; in *Beowulf*, the death of Grendel's mother immediately results in a revelation of sun-like light. In both texts, evil creatures from a bog harass nearby people on dark nights, even approaching their homes.

63 I.e., an old, grey and perhaps hoar-frosted boundary marker, in this case between the worlds of the living and the dead; cf. *Beowulf* 887, 2553, 2744. See *OED* s.v. *hoar* (a. and n. (A.3)) and *hoar-stone*; Cooke, 'Two Notes on *Beowulf*', 297–301 at 298–300. Cf. *OED* s.v. *merestone*, in which *mere* means 'boundary' rather than 'mere, lake'.

64 Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 37–45; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 155–8.

65 See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, 158.

Less clear is the possible correspondence of candles, cross and twigs in the folk-tale to the intimated combination (if my interpretation is correct) of candle, Cross and twig-swords in *Beowulf*.⁶⁶ Such similarities invite investigation of whether the folk-tale's focus on the dark moon finds parallel in the homily and, more importantly, in *Beowulf*.

As noted earlier, there is no trace of the moon in the homily. But there could conceivably have been other, related sources that featured a dark moon, having taken their cue from the *Visio*'s location of Hell beyond 'the setting of the sun', where 'there was no light ... but darkness and sorrow and sadness'.⁶⁷

The folk-tale's similarities to *Beowulf* encourage the following examination of the possible presence of an Old English noun *nið* meaning 'waning/dark (phase of the) moon' in the Anglo-Saxon poem.

Nið 'Waning/Dark Moon' (?) in *Beowulf*

Dictionaries of Old English adduce no word clearly corresponding to ON *nið* in the sense 'waning/dark moon'.⁶⁸ Even so, a cognate OE *nið* (also with short 'i') might be present, or sometimes alluded to through wordplay, in *Beowulf* both as a simplex and as the first element of compounds. It is currently explained as a noun (with long 'i') meaning chiefly 'hostility', 'affliction', 'violence' or 'battle'. Assuming an early date for *Beowulf*, however, the ostensible absence of an OE *nið* 'waning/dark moon' from other Old English sources might simply indicate that, as an uncommon word, it was never subsequently recorded, or that it fell out of use fairly early.

I start with the compounds in *Beowulf* which have *nip* as their first element, as these supply much of the more promising evidence. Candidates for the inclusion of putative OE *nið* 'waning/dark moon'

66 On Hrunting and the giant sword as twig-swords, see Chapter 16. On the use of hazel rods to ward off ghosts, revenants and evil in Scandinavian tradition, see H. Baklid, 'Hazel Rods in Graves', *Arv* 73 (2017), 7–26. Perhaps also compare the folk-tale's wise old woman of the mill, whose instructions enable the people to rescue the Moon from her stone coffin, with *Svipdagsmál*'s Sinmara, guardian of the chest containing the twig-sword *Lævateinn* beneath a 'milling' maelstrom.

67 Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 633.

68 It is uncertain whether, in the Old English poem *Christ and Satan* (ASPR, 632), *nið* (with short vowel) means 'place low down, pit' and is cognate with ON *nið* 'dark of moon', as AEW s.v. *nið* proposes; this instance might instead be *nið* (with long vowel), meaning 'hostility, torment'. At the time of writing, DOE has yet to reach the letter 'n'.

include the following (in alphabetical order, with their current, standard interpretations):⁶⁹

- (a) *niðdraca* (2273), 'hostile or malicious dragon'
- (b) *niðgæst* (2699), 'malicious (stranger or) foe'
- (c) *niþgeweorc* (683), 'hostile deed, fight'
- (d) *niþgrim(m)* (193), 'grim, cruel'
- (e) *niðgripe* (976), 'malicious grip'
- (f) *niðheard* (2417), 'brave in battle'
- (g) *niðhedig* (3165), 'hostile'
- (h) *niðsele* (1513), 'hostile or battle hall'
- (i) *niðwundor* (1365), 'dreadful wonder'

Since in all these compounds the 'i' in the first syllable is followed by two or more consonants, it cannot be determined on metrical grounds whether it is long or short. An OE *nið* 'waning/dark moon' (with short 'i') may therefore be entertained in these cases, if that sense suits the immediate context. Let us examine each in turn:

- | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (a) | Hordwynne fond
eald uhtsceaða opene standan,
se ðe byrnende biorgas seceð,
nacod niðdraca, nihtes fleogeð
fyre befangen. (2270–74) |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

The old, before-dawn ravager found the hoard-joy [i.e., hoard] standing open, he who burning seeks barrows, the naked *nið*-dragon, (which) flies by night enveloped by fire.

Here *nið*- alliterates with *nihtes* 'by night'⁷⁰ and describes a fiery dragon which attacks before dawn.⁷¹ Shortly earlier, we learnt that this dragon,

69 The following list gives the definitions found in the glossary to *KB*. In all cases *KB* identifies *nið(-)* as having a long 'i'.

70 In addition to the further instances, identified below, of *nið* alliterating with *niht* 'night' in *Beowulf*, note *nihta ... Nið* in *Genesis A* (*ASPR*, 1383); *niht ... niða* in *Judith* (34); *niðhetum, nihtlangne* in *Andreas* (834). Cf. also *niðða ... niþtrim* in *Guðlac B* (1097); *mona ... nihtes ... niþer* in *Christ* (937–8).

71 Prior studies of this dragon, which do not raise the possibility of a link to the moon, include A. E. DuBois, 'The Dragon in *Beowulf*', *PMLA* 72 (1957), 819–22; Brown,

which on account of its chthonic den is also an *eorðdraca* ‘earth-dragon’ (2712, 2825), ruled *deorcum nihtum* ‘in dark nights’ (2211), rather as Grendel had in Heorot.⁷² This candidate for OE *nið* ‘waning/dark moon’ is the most persuasive, given the comparable reference in *Völuspá* 66 to *inn dimmi dreki* ‘the dim/dark dragon’ *Niðhoggr* ‘Dark-Moon Striker’,⁷³ which flies up *Niðaffjöllum* ‘from Nið’s [‘Dark-Moon’s’, i.e., a dwarf’s]/Dark-Moons’ Mountains’.⁷⁴ Since the *niðdraca* lies on rusty treasure, however, another, albeit probably slender, possibility is that it is a ‘rust-dragon’, if *nið-* is related rather to Gothic *nidwa* ‘rust’.⁷⁵

(b) þæt he þone niðgæst nioðor hwene sloh (2699)

so that he struck the *nið*-guest/visitor/creature a little further down.

Again, *nið-* describes the dragon. We may note the alliteration of, and wordplay between, *nið-* and *nioðor* ‘further down’; compare *neðan frá Niðaffjöllum ... Niðhoggr* ‘from beneath from Niðaffjöll ... Niðhoggr’

‘Firedrake’; T. L. Keller, ‘The Dragon in *Beowulf* Revisited’, *Aevum* 55 (1981), 218–28; H. Shilton, ‘The Nature of *Beowulf*’s Dragon’, *BJRL* 79 (1997), 67–78; Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*; E. W. Barber and P. T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* (Princeton, 2004), 231–44.

- 72 On the representation in mythology of the dark moon as a sun-eclipsing dragon that rises from the earth, see E. G. Suhr, ‘The Horned Moses’, *Folklore* 74 (1963), 387–95 at 391–3; Suhr, ‘Interpretation’.
- 73 Perhaps secondarily *Niðhoggr* ‘Hostile Striker’. The name is also found alliterating with *náinn* ‘corpse-like one’ (or ‘near kinsman’) and *niðr* ‘descendant’ in *PTP*, 931–2.
- 74 For the dwarf *Niði* (from *nið* ‘waning/dark moon’), see Chapter 13. The dragon’s darkness (or dimness) and place of origin favour the first interpretation of its name: ‘Waning/Dark-Moon Striker’. Earlier, in *Völuspá* 38–9, *Niðhoggr* is located *sólu fjarri* ‘far from the sun’ in a hellish hall called *Náströnd* ‘Corpse-Shore’. Snakes entwined this hall, drops of venom fell in through its roof-vent (cf. Chapter 16 on the Bedale pommel), and heavy currents assailed deceased criminals inside. There *Niðhoggr* sucked the bodies of the dead and a *vargr* ‘wolf/criminal’ — not necessarily distinct from *Niðhoggr*, given the composite wolf-snake on the Gosforth Cross — tore men to pieces. Cf. Grendel and his mother as wolfish, criminal, man-eating inhabitants of a hall beneath a dark, snake-infested, turbulent, hellish mere, on whose shore the head of *Æschere* was found. Note also *Gylfaginning*’s location of *Niðhoggr* in a spring in *Niflheimr* ‘Mist-Home’ called *Hvergelmir* ‘Cauldron Roarer(?)’ (*SnEGylf*, 9, 53), which according to *Grimnismál* 26 is filled with drips from the horns of the hart *Eikþyrnir* which stands on *Óðinn*’s hall. Cf. the horned hart that would not hide its head in Grendel’s mist-enveloped, turbulent mere near Heorot (*Beowulf* 1368–72).
- 75 A connection between Gothic *nidwa* ‘rust’ and ON *nið-* in *Völuspá* 50’s *niðfolr* ‘rust-pale(?)’ is made by Falk, ‘Oldnorske ordforklaringer’, 111 without reference to the dragon of *Beowulf*. The etymology of *nidwa* is disputed, however; see W. P. Lehmann, *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary* (Leiden, 1986), 266.

in *Völuspá* 66. OE *niðgæst*, or a very similar word, also appears in the Old English poem *Guthlac A* (*niðgista/nyðgista*, 540), where it describes tormenting demons of the wilderness (like Grendel).

- (c) ‘Nat he þara goda þæt he me ongean slea,
 rand geheawe, þeah ðe he rof sie
 niþgeweorca; ac wit on niht sculon
 secge ofersittan ...’ (681–4)

‘He does not know of those good (skills) with which he might strike against me, hew the shield, although he may be brave in *niþ*-deeds; but we two shall by night forgo the sword ...’

Here *niþ*- describes Grendel’s deeds. It again alliterates with *niht* ‘night’.

- (d) *nydwracu niþgrim, nihtbealwa mæst* (193)

violent-persecution *niþ*-grim, greatest of night-attacks

Similarly, *niþ*- here describes Grendel’s attacks and alliterates with *niht*-. There is wordplay between *niþ*- and *nyd*- ‘necessity, violence’. OE *niþgrim* recurs in the *Paris Psalter* (54:12) where the speaker says that *me beþeahton þeostru niþgrim* ‘*niþ*-grim darknesses covered me’ — observe the association with darkness.

- (e) ‘... ac hyne sar hafað
 in *niðgripe* nearwe befongen’ (975–6)

‘but pain has him [i.e., Grendel] in a *nið*-grip, narrowly/darkly(?)⁷⁶ encompassed’

This instance is uncertain, as *nið*- in *niðgripe* is an emendation of the manuscript reading *mid* which assumes two scribal errors, albeit simple ones. Assuming the emendation is correct, *nið*- is again associated with Grendel, this time as he lies mortally wounded at the bottom of the mere, in his *nið*-hall (h).

- (f) *Gesæt ða on næsse niðheard cyning* (2417)

Then the *nið*-hard king sat on the headland

⁷⁶ For the possible connotation ‘darkly’, see n. 64 below.

Here *nið-* describes Beowulf before he fights the *nið*-dragon. OE *niðheard* also appears in the Old English poem *Judith* (277), which follows *Beowulf* in the manuscript, with the meaning ‘bold’, ‘daring’.

(g) *niðhedige men genumen hæfdon* (3165)

nið-minded men had taken

These words concern men who had taken treasure from the *nið*-dragon’s den. *KB* defines the unique compound *niðhedige* as ‘hostile’, but it is not clear why these presumably mournful men should be so described. It would seem more likely that they were thinking (*-hedig-* derives from *hycgan* ‘to think’) of the dragon’s hostility (*nið* with long ‘i’) or, more immediately, of the darkness (*nið* with short ‘i’) within the dragon’s den.

(h) *Ða se eorl ongeat
pæt he in niðsele nathwylcum wæs* (1512–3)

Then the nobleman perceived that he was in a certain *nið*-hall.

Here *nið-* describes the ‘hall’ at the bottom of the mere in which Beowulf finds himself during his fight with Grendel’s mother. This hall is implicitly the inverse of Heorot, the gold-hall which illuminated lands like the sun. As such, it may be a ‘dark-moon hall’.

(i) ‘*Pær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
fyr on flode.*’ (1365–6)

‘There each night a *nið*-wonder can be seen, fire on [or ‘in’] the flood.’

Here *nið-* describes the weird nocturnal fire on, or in, Grendel’s mere. Again, the word’s alliterative partner is *niht*. The fire finds likely parallel in the dark, discerning flicker-flame around the home of Gerðr, who, if my interpretation is correct, is a lunar giantess who has appropriated sunlight.

Moving on to the fifteen instances of *nið* as a simplex in *Beowulf*, we find no clear instances of a sense ‘waning/dark moon’.⁷⁷ However,

⁷⁷ Nor do I find any clear instances elsewhere in Old English texts, though the instance of *nið* in *The Fight at Finnsburg* (quoted below) catches the eye. Notably, perhaps,

a connection with *niht* remains apparent, even if only one instance alliterates structurally with this word. Also clear is an association with the poem's nocturnal monsters.

OE *nið* (again with short or long 'i') is implicitly paired, through apposition, with *niht* in Beowulf's description of how Grendel:

(j) 'deorcum nihtum
eaweð þurh egsan uncuðne nið.' (275–6)

'on dark nights reveals through terror unknown [i.e., unheard of] *nið*.'

Similarly, we find *nið* (with short or long 'i') juxtaposed with *niht* and associated with the hostility of monsters, including Grendel, when Beowulf declares:

(k) 'yðde eotena cyn ond on yðum slog
niceras nihtes, nearoþearfe dreah,
wræc Wedera nið — wean ahsodon—
forgrand gramum, ond nu wið Grendel sceal ...' (421–4)

'I destroyed the race of giants and in the waves slew water-monsters by night, endured narrow/dark-necessity⁷⁸ [i.e., dire straits], avenged the *nið* of the *Wederas* 'We(a)ther-(Geat)s' — they had sought woe—ground angry ones to pieces, and now against Grendel I shall ...'

After Beowulf had torn off Grendel's arm, the monster fled, the *dogera dægri* 'day-count of his days' (823) having ended. Beowulf had cleansed Hroðgar's hall:

(l) genered wið niðe. Nihtweorce gefeh (827)

saved it from *nið*. He rejoiced in his night-work.

in *Riddle 4* (ASPR 6) of the *Exeter Book*, the warrior-sun declares that it *næte mid niþe* 'oppresses with enmity' (4), apparently with *no* hint of a pun; Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 71.

78 For the basis of my translation of OE *nearo-* as 'dark' when linked with *niht* 'night', see T. Hofstra, 'A Note on the "Darkness of the Night" Motif in Alliterative Poetry, and the Search for the Poet of the Old Saxon *Heliland*', in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (ed.), *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose* (Groningen, 1994), 93–104.

Here the 'i' in *nið* could be either short (with its syllable and the following unstressed syllable being metrically 'resolved') or long. The word alliterates with *niht* and is associated with Grendel.

Next we see *nið* (with short or long 'i') alliterating with a type of aquatic monster and linked to Grendel when, once morning had come, the Danes saw that their foe had departed:

(m) *niða ofercumen, on nicera mere* (845)

overcome by *niðas* ['by force?'], into the mere of water-monsters⁷⁹

A much later passage during the episode of the *nið*-dragon implicitly associates Grendel and his mother with *nið* (with short or long 'i'):

(n) *forðon he ær fela,
nearo neðende, niða gedigde,
hildehlemma, syððan he Hroðgares,
sigoreadig secg, sele fælsode
ond æt guðe forgrap Grendeles mægum
laðan cynnes.* (2349–54)

because he [Beowulf] had earlier, braving narrowness/darkness(?) [i.e., dire straits], survived many *niðas*, battle-crashes, when he, a victory-eager man, cleansed Hroðgar's hall and in battle gripped to death Grendel's kin, of loathsome kind.

The poet also associates the simplex *nið* with the *nið*-dragon. When it spewed fire:

(o) *Wæs þæs wyrmes wig wide gesyne,
nearofages nið, nean ond feorran.* (2316–7)

The worm's warfare was widely seen, the narrow/dark(?)-hostile/shining/coloured one's *nið*, near and far.

Here *nið* may have either a short or a long 'i'.⁸⁰ I return to this instance later in this chapter.

⁷⁹ Similarly, *niða genæged* 'laid low by *niðas* ['by force?']' (1439), vis-à-vis one of the mere's monstrous inhabitants.

⁸⁰ Here we also see *nið* paired with *nearo* 'narrow'/'dark(?)', a combination seen earlier in (e) *niðgripe nearwe*, (k) *nearoþearfe* ... *nið* and (n) *nearo* ... *niða* (it recurs in other Old

When Beowulf's sword failed against the bone of the *nið*-dragon, the weapon was:

(p) *nacod æt niðe* (2585)

naked in the *nið*

Here *nið* must have a long 'i'; a connection with *nið*- (potentially with short 'i') in *niðdraca* seems inescapable.

And when Beowulf shattered the sword against the dragon's head, the weapon was:

(q) *nipe genyded* (2680)

compelled by *nip*

Here *nið* may have either a long or a short 'i'. The phrase may refer to the force of Beowulf's stroke ('compelled by violence'), or to the reason for the sword's shattering, or to both. I favour a case of deliberate ambiguity.⁸¹ Again, a nod to the first element of *niðdraca* seems likely.

The fourteen uses of OE *nið* as the second element of compounds in *Beowulf* do not offer strong support for the present thesis.⁸² But nor do they fatally undermine it, and they may offer some support. Five instances might hint at the dark moon or associated darkness: *bealonið* (2404), referring to the 'dire affliction' inflicted by the *nið*-dragon; *bealoniðe* 'fierce rage' (2714), denoting the action of the same dragon's poison; *færniða* (476), which, we saw earlier, describes the 'sudden attacks' with which Grendel 'waned' the Danes of Heorot; *heteniðas* 'enmities' (152), similarly describing Grendel's dark, nocturnal attacks; and *searoniðas* 'battles' (3067), in this case sought by Beowulf from the *nið*-dragon.

English texts). It might be relevant that, according to Ælfric, *þæs monan ryne is nearo, forðan þe he yrnð ealra tungla nyðemest* 'the moon's course is narrow [*nearo*], because it runs the lowest of all luminaries'; Blake, *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*, 82.

81 The punctuation in *KB* eliminates any ambiguity: *nipe genyded*; *Nægling forbaerst* 'compelled by *nip*; *Nægling burst*'. The likelihood of wordplay on *nið* in the dragon-episode is strengthened by the second of the poet's two uses of another similar-sounding noun, *nipðas* 'men'. The thief who entered the dark den of the *niðdraca* is *nið[ð]a nathwylc* 'a certain one of men' (2215). The manuscript reading *niða* admits a pun on 'of ill intentions/afflictions' and perhaps on 'of waning/dark moons' or 'of waning/dark phases of the moon'.

82 The full list is *bealonið*, *færnið*, *herenið*, *hetenið*, *inwitnið*, *searonið* and *wælnið*; some occur more than once in the poem. I am not aware of any Old Norse compounds that have *nið* 'waning/dark moon' in secondary position.

Viewed collectively, this evidence about (-)nið(-) is inconclusive, but not discouraging. As the first element of compounds especially, *nið* alliterates with *niht* 'night' on several occasions and is associated with the poem's nocturnal monsters, including their deeds and homes. Its association with the *niðdraca* is especially interesting, given the parallel with *Niðhoggr*, an Old Norse dragon of (probably) the dark moon.⁸³ Additionally, wordplay is evident, with a pun on *niððor* probably also finding parallel in Old Norse (b). The repeated pairing of OE *nið* with *niht* suggests a meaningfully close connection between these words, a possibility that strengthens in light of instances of a corresponding pairing in Old Norse mythological Eddic poetry.⁸⁴

In *Vafþrúðnismál* Óðinn engages in a wisdom contest with the giant *Vafþrúðnir*. After learning where *Máni* 'Moon' and *Sól* 'Sun' came from (22–3), he asks the giant *hvaðan Dagr um kom ... eða Nótt með niðum* 'whence *Dagr* 'Day' came ... or *Nótt* 'Night' with its *niðum*' (24). Here *niðum*, dative plural of *nið*, means 'waning/dark moons' or 'the moon's waning and dark phases',⁸⁵ and it alliterates with *Nótt* (cognate with OE *niht*). In response, *Vafþrúðnir* identifies *Dagr*'s father, and *Nótt*'s, and adds that the gods made *ný ok nið* 'new [i.e., waxing] moon(s) and waning/dark moon(s)' as an *ártal* 'year-tally' for men (25).⁸⁶

ON *nið* may also alliterate with *nótt* in *Völuspá*'s account of the heathen Creation. After mentioning the sun and moon, the poet records that the gods gave names *nótt ok niðjum* 'to night and (its) *niðjum*' (6). Here it is uncertain whether *niðjum* is the dative plural of *niðr* 'kin' or an alternative dative plural of *nið* 'dark (phase of the) moon'.⁸⁷ The ambiguity may be deliberate.⁸⁸

83 If the *niðdraca* is accepted as a dragon of the waning or dark moon, or as an allusion to such a creature, this does not preclude additional explanations of its nature in terms of other celestial phenomena, such as comets, meteors and meteorites, which could account for the fiery destruction it causes (see Brown, 'Firedrake', 447–54; Gräslund, *Beowulfkvädet*; OED s.v. 'fire-drake' 2a).

84 ON *nið* 'waning/dark moon' does not occur in any skaldic poem, according to *PTP*, 914. Other Old Norse terms for 'waning (crescent) moon' might be *múlinn* (or *múlinn/mýlinn/mýlinn*) and *skarmr*; see *ibid.*, 912–3.

85 Cf. Machan, *Vafþrúðnismál*, 132; La Farge and Tucker, *Glossary*, s.v. *niðar*.

86 Cf. how, by ending Grendel's *dogera dægrim* 'day-count of days', *Beowulf* saved the solar hall of Heorot from *nið*—the darkness of the dark moon? The Old Norse alliterative pairing *ný ... nið* recurs in a stanza listing terms for the moon in *PTP*, 912.

87 See La Farge and Tucker, *Glossary*, s.v. *nið* and *niðr*¹.

88 Cf. my remarks on *Niðjungar* in Chapter 13.

Finally, there may well be an association of OE *nið* with a waning moon outside *Beowulf* in *The Fight at Finnsburg*, a fragmentary poem about events also treated in the Finnsburg-episode of *Beowulf*:

‘Nu scyneð þes mona,
waðol under wolcnum; nu arisað weadæda
ðe ðisne folces nið fremman willað.’ (7–9)⁸⁹

‘Now shines this moon, waning/the waning moon(?) behind clouds; now woe-deeds arise which will advance this hostility [with a pun on ‘lunar wane’?] of the people.’

Here *waðol*, a word attested nowhere else in Old English, is often translated ‘wandering’ (compare OE *wað* ‘wandering’), sometimes in relation to the full moon.⁹⁰ I suggest, however, that it is rather a predecessor of the obsolete English dialect noun ‘waddle’, which meant ‘wane of the moon’,⁹¹ and that it bears a corresponding sense; the woeful deeds, it seems to me, will be perpetrated in dim moonlight, under a waning, cloud-obscured crescent. If this interpretation is correct, the presence of the noun *nið* ‘hostility’ so shortly thereafter is suggestive of a pun on **nið* ‘lunar wane’ (metrically, the ‘i’ could be long or short).

Overall, there is reason to think that—especially as the first element of compounds associated with nocturnal monsters, their deeds and abodes—*nið* in *Beowulf* might not always mean ‘hostile’/‘hostility’, ‘affliction’, ‘violence’ or ‘battle’ (and similar senses). It might sometimes denote the waning or dark moon, or the darkness associated therewith. Additionally, in some cases such a meaning may be a secondary connotation (occasionally along with ‘beneath’ and ‘low place’).

This proposal gains credibility from further comparative evidence suggesting that Grendel and his mother may be identified with the moon, especially in its waning and dark phases. I start by examining

89 *KB*, 283. Before identifying the moon, the speaker denies that the light in question is that of a flying *draca* ‘dragon’ (3).

90 See e.g., *KB*, 452; D. K. Fry (ed.), *Finnsburh Fragment and Episode* (London, 1974), 77, which notes that ‘MHG. *wadel* “wandering, erratic” is often cited, referring to full or new moon.’

91 *EDD* s.v. *waddle* sb.² (instance from Somerset dated 1678); *OED* s.v. *waddle*, n. 2: ‘The wane of the moon’ (with the comment ‘cf. OHG., MHG. *wadal*, MLG. *wadel* (:–**waplo*-) phases or change of the moon’). Cf. ON *vaðill* in the sword-name *Angrvaðill* mentioned later in this chapter.

Grendel's eyes, especially in relation to those of his most famous Icelandic analogue, Glámr.

Grendel and Glámr, the Monster with Moonlit Eyes

Grendel had horribly gleaming eyes. After bursting through the door of Heorot, he stepped onto the floor and *him of eagum stod / ligge gelicost leoht unfæger* 'from his eyes stood, most like flame, an unlovely light' (726–7). This light is immediately suggestive of several things: Grendel's burning inner rage, the fires of Hell and the nocturnal fire on, or in, his mere.

The similarity between Grendel's mere and the Lake of the Moon in *Wonders* invites the suggestion that the mere's fire was identified with moonlight, a possibility made more attractive by its introduction as a *níðwundor* 'waning/dark-moon(?) wonder' (1365). As the mere was set within fenland, another naturalistic explanation of this wondrous nocturnal fire is as *ignis fatuus*, a will-o'-the-wisp, the bluish hue of which (according to some reports) might be described as dark and its glow likened to or associated with moonlight.⁹² In *För Skírnis*, Skírnir's

92 The mere-fire is also paralleled by the fiery, surging 'burn' that issues from, and prevents entry to, the dragon's lair (2545–9); in later centuries at least, a 'fire-drake' was also a will-o'-the-wisp (*OED* s.v. 'fire-drake' 2b; Brown, 'Firedrake', 452). On the phenomenon of *ignis fatuus*, commonly deemed sinister, see W. W. Newell, 'The Ignis Fatuus, Its Character and Legendary Origin', *JAF* 17 (1904), 39–60; J. A. Lindell, 'The Ignis Erraticus', <https://web.archive.org/web/20090725120148/http://jeff.lindell.home.comcast.net/~jeff.lindell/Ignis%20Erraticus.html>; D. Meredith, 'Hazards in the Bog: Real and Imagined', *Geographical Review* 92 (2002), 319–32 at 327–30, which includes an account of a will-o'-the-wisp whose 'light filled the room with a chilly, moonlike glow' (330). *Gull-Þóris saga* describes a mysterious *haugaeldr* 'grave-mound fire' as shining as if *af tungli* 'from the moon' and flickering on top *blám loga* 'with dark-blue flame' (the moon may occasionally appear blue because of the presence of dust in the atmosphere); Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 183. That such a fire may be identifiable as, or closely related to, *ignis fatuus* is indicated by chapter 85 of *Egils saga*, which records the belief that at the end of his life the hero deposited his treasure in a deep marsh or in hot springs with large pits nearby, *því at þangat er optlíga sénn haugaeldr* 'because mound-fire is often seen there'; Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga*, 297–8; Viðar Hreinsson, *Complete Sagas*, I, 176 translates *haugaeldr* as 'will-o'-the-wisp'. Nocturnal grave-mound fire also marked the burial site of Tyrffingr; Tolkien, *Saga*, 13, 16. Additionally, that such a fire was indicative of hidden treasure is shown by an episode from chapter 18 of *Grettis saga*, one analogous to the mere-episode of *Beowulf*. It records that, late one evening, Grettir saw a great fire *gjósa upp* 'gush up' from a burial mound on a headland. He went there, broke in, fought and beheaded its undead inhabitant, Kárr, with the sword *Jökulsnautr* 'Jökull's [Icicle's/Glacier's] Gift/Booty' (seemingly also known as *Ættartangi* 'Family's Tang' in *Vatnsdæla saga*),

similar journey to the home of the (in my view) lunar Gerðr took him through a probably equivalent fire described as *myrkvan ... vísan vafrloga* 'dark, discerning flicker-flame'.⁹³ The concept of dark, flickering fire might also reflect the sight of a corona around the dark moon as it eclipses the sun, albeit only during daytime.⁹⁴ In a half-stanza attributed to Einarr Skúlason, the uneclipsed sun is described as a high *vafrlögi* 'flicker-flame', neither dark nor discerning.⁹⁵

References to other dark fires in Old English and Old Norse texts should also be noted.⁹⁶ From the Old English poem *Christ and Satan*, for example, we learn that Satan was assailed in Hell by *se wonna læg* 'the dark fire' (*ASPR*, 714). And in *Vafþrúðnismál* 50–1 the fire of Ragnarök is *surtalögi* 'dark flame', which probably became conflated with the flame of Surtr, possessor of Sinmara in *Svipdagsmál*.⁹⁷

and left with treasure including a splendid *sax* 'short sword'. This *sax* was an heirloom of the family of his host, Kárr's son, to whom Grettir gave it, and who, in turn, gave it to Grettir. Since, in the same episode, Grettir speaks a skaldic verse mentioning the sword *Hrotti*, comparable to *Hrunting* in *Beowulf*, it is tempting also to relate *Jökulsnautr* to the giant sword which melts *hildegicelum* 'with battle-icicles', ON *jökull* and OE *gicel* 'icicle' being cognate (though there is no melting in the saga); it is especially intriguing that this sword should also be known as 'Family's Tang' (*pars pro toto* 'Family's Hilt?'), as that is what (in my view) the giant sword's hilt is to Hroðgar. For the episode, see Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 57–61. For thoughts on *Jökulsnautr*/Ættartangi, which might earlier have been taken from a giant thief, see Jones, *Vatnsdalers' Saga*, 135; H. R. E. Davidson, 'The Sword at the Wedding', *Folklore* 71 (1960), 1–18 at 7–8; R. L. Harris, 'The Proverbs of *Vatnsdæla saga*, the Sword of Jökull and the Fate of Grettir: Examining an Instance of Conscious Intertextuality in *Grettis saga*', https://www.usask.ca/english/icelanders/applic_Vatns-Grettla.html. Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, I, 276 ff. records later Icelandic traditions that a mysterious, often dark blue, fire (sometimes called *málmlogi* 'metal-flame') marked the site of buried treasure.

93 Presumably related is the fire past or though which *Svipdagr* journeyed to *Menglóð* in *Svipdagsmál*, although its flame is not said to be dark. Another *vafrlögi*, also not identified as dark, surrounded *Brynhildr*'s stronghold, according to Finch, *Saga of the Volsungs*, 50; and for another instance of the word, see *PTP*, 922. It has been identified as a likely loan from Old English; cf. the Anglo-Saxon poem *Daniel* (241), which refers to *wylm þæs wæfran liges* 'surging of the wavering fire' within a hellish oven (241); see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, Bd. 2, 80–2, which also comments further on the widespread ancient and medieval idea of the boundary fire.

94 Cf. Suhr, 'Maerchen', 278.

95 *PTP*, 151–2.

96 At least in some cases, the image probably derives from Patristic descriptions of Hell. For instances additional to those given below, and for discussion, see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, Bd. 2, 82–3; Samplonius, 'Background', 121–5.

97 See Samplonius, 'Background', 121–2. There may be a hint of apocalyptic dark fire at the end of *Beowulf* when Wiglaf, speaking about the hero's cremation, declares: 'Nu

The thought that the light emitted by Grendel's eyes was moonlight, or at least associated therewith, occurred to the eminent Anglo-Saxon scholar J. R. R. Tolkien. Although he did not express this view in his academic writings, his posthumously published poem *The Lay of Beowulf* records that 'Grendel came forth in the dead of night; the moon in his eyes shone glassy bright ... The moon gleamed in through the windows wan ... and a light in the demon's eyes there shone'.⁹⁸

This interpretation of Grendel's ocular radiance is encouraged by comparison with the climax to a well-known Old Norse parallel to Beowulf's fight with Grendel, namely Grettir's fight with an undead Swede called Glámr who, when alive, was *mikill vexti ok undarligri í yfirbragði, gráeygr [v.l. bláeygðr] ok opineygr, úlfsgrár á hársliit* 'great in stature and wonderful in appearance, grey-eyed [v.l. black/dark-blue-eyed] and open/wide-eyed, wolf-grey in hair-colour',⁹⁹ and hostile to Christianity:

Tunglskin var mikít úti ok gluggaþykkn; hratt stundum fyrir, en stundum dró frá. Nú í því er Glámr fell, rak skýit frá tunglinu, en Glámr hvessti augun upp í móti, ok svá hefir Grettir sagt sjálfr, at þá eina sýn hafi hann sét svá, at honum brygði við. Þá sigaði svá at honum af öllu saman, mœði ok því, er hann sá, at Glámr gaut sínum sjónum harðliga, at hann gat eigi brugðit saxinu ok lá nálíga í milli heims ok heljar. En því var meiri ófagnaðarkraptr með Glámi en flestum öðrum aþrýgngumönnum, at hann mælti þá á þessa leið ...¹⁰⁰

The moonlight was strong outside and there was dense cloud with openings in it; at times the cloud drifted in front of the moon, and at times drifted away. Now at the moment when Glámr fell, the cloud drifted away from the

seal gled fretan /—weaxan wonna leg—wigena strengel' (3114–5) '“Now embers shall consume—flames grow dark—the chief of warriors’. According to *SnEGylf*, 50–1, at Ragnarök Freyr (compare Beowulf) will fight and be killed by Surtr (compare the dragon), who will then burn the whole world.

98 Tolkien, *Beowulf*, 417–8, 420, 424. In Tolkien's *Sellic Spell*, Grinder (i.e., Grendel) 'walked swiftly under the moon', and the water-monsters of his mere 'used to lie in the moonlight'; *ibid.*, 370, 380.

99 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 110. Scowcroft, 'Irish Analogues', 39–40 gives reasons for thinking that Glámr's portrayal in the saga is influenced by that of Grendel. I am not the first to suggest a link between the eyes of Glámr and Grendel. For a dissenting view, however, see M. D. Hensel, 'De Monstro: An Anatomy of Grendel' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oregon, 2012), 117.

100 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 121.

moon, and Glámr turned his eyes up keenly toward it, and Grettir has said so himself that that is the only sight he has seen that shook him. Then he [Grettir] sank—all his strength left him, what with exhaustion and what he saw, namely that Glámr gazed harshly with his eyes, so that he [Grettir] did not get the short-sword drawn and lay nearly between this world and Hel.¹⁰¹ And at that moment there was more unhappy power with Glámr than with most other undead men, so that he spoke then in this way ...

Glámr then cursed Grettir, so that he would grow no stronger than at that moment and would thereby remain only half as strong as he would otherwise have become. Glámr, who had an enormous head (like Grendel), also said that the horrific vision of his moonlit eyes would always remain in Grettir's sight.

From this passage it is clear that there is a connection between Glámr and the moon.¹⁰² Whatever the precise nature of that relationship, that it was probably close is indicated by the inclusion of the noun *glámr*, literally 'gleam, evening twilight', in a list of terms for 'moon'.¹⁰³ Glámr, it appears, was a moon-monster-man, one with giantish and lupine traits—like Grendel and Grendel's mother.

Unlike Glámr, Grendel is not said to gaze at the moon, but his eyes did emit an unlovely light. This could be significant because in Old Norse poems an eye may be described as, for example, a *brámáni* or *brátungl* 'eyelid/brow-moon',¹⁰⁴ while the moon was called *skjágr* 'squinter'.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, that the glint of a man's eye might be imagined as a kind of terrifying moonlight indicative of homicidal intent

101 Cf. the position of the hanging souls in the Blickling homily, and of the prostrate, tethered Moon in *The Dead Moon*.

102 Cf. an episode in chapter 78 of Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Brennu-Njáls saga*, 192–3. Two men were out one night to the south of the burial mound of the hero Gunnarr when *tunglskin var bjart, en stundum dró fyrir* 'the moonlight was bright, but at times clouds drifted in front of it'. It seemed to them that the mound was open and lit by burning light, and that Gunnarr *sá i móti tunglinu* 'gazed toward the moon', whereupon he recited a poem which they interpreted as a call to avenge his death. On the significance of Glámr's eyes, see also Ármann Jakobsson, *Nine Saga Studies*, 131.

103 *SnESkald*, I, 85; *PTP*, 912–3, which also notes Shetlandic Norn *glom(er)* 'moon, pale light'. See further Signorini, 'Monsters', 35. *Glámr* is also a giant's name; *PTP*, 719–20.

104 See *LP*. The English lexicon includes 'moon-eye' and 'moon-eyed', for which see *OED* and *EDD*.

105 *SnESkald*, I, 85.

is shown by the description of the gaze of *Eiríkr blóðøx* ‘Erik Blood-Axe’ in *Arinbjarnarkviða* ‘Arinbjörn’s Poem’, a skaldic composition attributed to the Icelander Egill Skalla-Grímsson.¹⁰⁶ As Egill saw things during a supposed encounter between the pair in tenth-century York, during which his head was at stake:

‘Vasa þat tunglskin
tryggt at líta
né ógnlaust
Eiríks bráa,
þás ormfránn
ennimáni
skein allvalds
ægigeislum.’¹⁰⁷

‘The moonlight of Eiríkr’s eyelids was not safe to look at, nor terror-less, when the snake-glittering brow-moon [EYE]¹⁰⁸ of the ruler shone with terrible rays.’

It may be added that although Glámr is introduced as a shepherd, when we first meet him he is bringing *hrís* ‘brushwood’ on a horse from *Goðaskógr* ‘Temple-Priests’ Wood’ (also translatable as ‘Gods’ Wood’).¹⁰⁹ This detail might allude to the tradition of the Man in the Moon as a gatherer of branches, although since Glámr was sent by one of the wood’s owners, we cannot assume the brushwood was stolen. More obviously significant is the living Glámr’s death during a night of blizzard and *niðamyrkr* ‘pitch blackness’ – in other words, an icy night of the dark moon.¹¹⁰

Grendel’s Mother and Norse Moon-Giantesses

Various Old Norse giantesses and troll-women are associated certainly or probably with the moon. They call to mind Grendel’s mother. We have already met *Mána*, the most obvious; *Gerðr*, whose likely lunar nature I return to in Chapter 16; and the pale *Sinmara*. In this section

106 See also n. 102 above.

107 Sigurður Nordal, *Egils saga*, 259.

108 For other identifications of the moon with a snake, see my discussion of the Gosforth Cross in Chapter 10.

109 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 109.

110 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 112.

I return to *Mána* in *Sörla saga sterka* and adduce comparable lunar characters in other Old Norse texts.

Mána, Moon-Giantess and Thief

As we saw earlier, *Sörla saga sterka* features a trollish old woman called *Mána* who is highly suggestive of Grendel's mother, just as the episode in which she appears strongly resembles Beowulf's fight in the mere. *Mána* almost certainly means 'Moon',¹¹¹ being a feminine equivalent of ON *máni* 'moon'. As such, a compelling parallel to Grendel's mother is a troll-woman who personifies the moon. And the lunar dimension of *Mána* goes beyond her name.

Mána's lunar nature probably explains why she has to acquire armour and a sword for *Sörli* within a month, as this is the approximate period from one new moon to the next. It may also help to explain the name of her husband, *Skrímnir/Skrímnir*, by supporting the suggestion that, in addition to relating to ON *skrim/skrimsll/skrimsll* 'monster', it may relate to ON *skrim* 'faint light, gleam'.¹¹² *Mána's* husband might, therefore, have had a comparable lunar aspect, perhaps especially associated with the weak light of the waning moon.

Also for comparison with Grendel's mother and Grendel, we may note that *Mána* and her husband are thieves and robbers. They plundered ships (as did *Ýma's* sisters and, we shall discover, their father), which they attracted by sorcery, and they robbed villagers of their animals. Additionally, *Mána* declares: '*Þar með höfum vit ok töfrat hingat marga góða gripa frá ýmsum herrum*' 'Therewith we have also magicked here many good treasures from various lords.'¹¹³ Grendel's lair contained armour and weapons, at least some presumably stripped from Danish warriors whom he had abducted as food; he also had magical power, though he is not said to have used it to acquire possessions.¹¹⁴ In the saga

111 Cf. B. Waggoner (trans.), *Sagas of Giants and Heroes* (New Haven, 2010), 192 n. 19.

112 See ANEW s.v. *skrim*; ÍO s.v. *Skrímir*, *Skrímnir*. The similar name *Skrýmir* is shown to have a long 'y' by the metre of a verse list of giant-names and another of sword-names, a finding which favours the meaning 'Big-Looking One'; see *PTP*, 713–4, 791–2. But there could well have been confusion, as well as deliberate exploitation of the ambiguity, of the forms and meanings of names that look and sound so similar.

113 *FSN*, III, 376.

114 Also compare *Práinn's* magical acquisition of treasures, including the sword *Mistilteinn*, in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* (below).

Mána sought the armour for Sörli from the Emperor *út á Serkland* 'out in Shirt-land', and it seems safe to assume that the ruler did not relinquish it willingly. She presumably also stole the accompanying sword.

Furthermore, it appears likely that behind the tale of Mána and Sörli is a myth about the defeat of a moon-giantess by the son of the sun, who acquired a marvellous sword in the process. This inference may be drawn from the name of Sörli's divinely descended mother: *Dagný* 'New Day'. We may recall that a light shone like the sun in the giants' lair immediately after the death of Grendel's mother, and that the overcoming of Vargeisa transformed her back into *Álsól* 'All(?) -Sun' or *Álfsól* 'Elf-Sun'.

Mána and Brana

Another trollish female called Mána appears in the Icelandic *Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra* 'Saga of Hálfðan, Brana's Fosterling',¹¹⁵ the oldest manuscripts of which date from the fifteenth century. She appears only briefly, however, as the five-year-old sister of a six-year-old troll-girl called *Molda* 'Earth' and of an older half-human, half-giantess named Brana, whom the hero and his companions encountered one evening when journeying *á jökla* 'on ice'.¹¹⁶ The saga's eponymous hero, a Danish prince whose name corresponds to OE *Healfdene* 'Half-Dane',¹¹⁷ ends a wrestling match between Mána and another man by toppling her over a cliff.¹¹⁸

In this saga, Mána's lunar nature is apparent only from her name and her link to her sister, Brana, whose actions, characteristics and name suggest a conflation of sun and full moon. Brana, who briefly chides Hálfðan for Mána's demise,¹¹⁹ therefore merits examination in some detail.

115 FSN, IV, 287–318. For an English translation, see Waggoner, *Sagas*, 87–109. For discussion, see P. A. Jorgensen, 'The Two-Troll Variant of the Bear's Son Folktale in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*', *Arv* 31 (1975), 35–43; McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 138–9, 239–40; McKinnell, 'Fantasy Giantess'.

116 FSN, IV, 301.

117 At the end of the saga Hálfðan becomes king of Denmark. He has at least one indirect link to Ing(i), as his radiant sister is called *Ingibjörg*. It also happens that his queen is called Marsibil, the name of Ingi's first wife in *Hjálmþés saga*.

118 FSN, IV, 301–2.

119 FSN, IV, 302.

Brana initially wrestled Hálfðan during this encounter, before he got the upper hand. She then revealed that she was neither *blóðdrekkur né mannæta* ‘blood-drinker nor man-eater’, but had afforded him vital help during an earlier fight. She explained that it was she who had given him a gold-ornamented (i.e., presumably golden-hilted) knife in the nick of time during a fight with a man-stealing troll-woman called *Sleggja* ‘Sledgehammer’, after he had beheaded *Sleggja*’s male companion with an axe.¹²⁰ Hálfðan had promptly used this knife to behead *Sleggja*. Earlier in that encounter, *Sleggja* had herself picked up a knife in the cave where they fought, before throwing it away to wrestle with Hálfðan, so we may suspect that the knife Hálfðan received was the same weapon.

Subsequently, Hálfðan returned this knife to Brana, as it was the only weapon with which she could kill her father, the giant *Járnhauss* ‘Iron-Skull’, a feat she achieved by stabbing him in the neck after extinguishing the light in his cave. *Í því kom dagr yfir hellisgluggann* ‘at that moment day came over the cave’s window [i.e., dawn broke]’, but *ekki brá Brana sér við þat* ‘Brana did not concern herself with that’. Instead, she simply opened a trapdoor in the cave’s floor, through which she disposed of her father’s corpse, and those of other giants, in the sea.¹²¹

Not only was Brana resistant to the giant-petrifying effects of sunlight, but after sleeping with Hálfðan she *hvarf í burtu hvern morgun, en kom ekki fyrr heim en at dagsetri* ‘she set out every morning, and did not come back before nightfall’. And then, one day, she announced to his surprise that *er sumardagr inn fyrsti á morgun* ‘the first day of summer is in the morning [i.e., tomorrow]’.¹²²

Obvious, if inexact, parallels with the events and characters of the mere-episode of *Beowulf* and related texts will be apparent.

Brana is also described as walking before her sisters and as *rauðkyrtla* ‘the red-tunicked one’, a description that indicates both pre-eminence and perhaps fieriness.¹²³ That she walked unharmed through flames to save Hálfðan from a burning castle proves that neither fire nor heat could harm her.¹²⁴

120 FSN, IV, 299, 302. Cf. the sudden sight of the giant sword of *Beowulf*. Note also that the troll-woman’s name would suit a blacksmith.

121 FSN, IV, 303–4.

122 FSN, IV, 304–5.

123 FSN, IV, 301. The colour red may also have been associated with giants and trolls; Waggoner, *Sagas*, 192 n. 18.

124 FSN, IV, 313.

Finally, the name *Brana* is of interest. It might be identifiable not as the common Icelandic word for ‘cow’ (she has no apparent bovine characteristics), but as a word derived from *brann*, past tense of ON *brenna* ‘to burn’.¹²⁵ More likely, however, since the moon-giantess acquired sunlight, the attributes of lunar and solar females were probably liable to conflation, in which case the meaning ‘cow’ could be appropriate. For moon-deities are often named after, represented by, or associated with bovines.¹²⁶

Skjaldvör, the ‘Dark-Moon Chest’ and More about the *Nið*-Dragon

Þorsteins þátr uxafóts features a troll-woman whose likely origins as a lunar creature are also obscured. Both she and the story in which she appears are nevertheless of great interest.¹²⁷

The tale’s eponymous hero is the illegitimate son of a Norwegian called Ívarr *ljómi* ‘Light’ (so-called because of his outstanding handsomeness), who for much of the story does not recognize Þorsteinn as his son. Þorsteinn’s mother was a woman whose muteness may point to a supernatural origin.

Þorsteinn was a huge baby who had survived exposure as an infant with help from Freysteinn *inn fagri* ‘the Fair’, a slave of noble birth who was to become his companion and a free man. Þorsteinn’s childhood spirit is externalized in one episode as a polar bear cub. He grew into an immensely strong young man who fought with the undead and with trolls.

Chapter 6 of the saga records how, during a dream, Þorsteinn visited a burial mound under instruction from a large man in red clothing called Brynjar.¹²⁸ In the mound Þorsteinn severed the arm of the evil undead leader.¹²⁹

125 Cf. *ANEW* and *ÍO* s.v.

126 See Cashford, *Moon*, 102–6, 211–2, 219–20; also *ibid.*, 84 for a folk-tale about a man who thought a cow had swallowed the moon and who therefore cut the beast open to release it. Note also the English word ‘moon-calf’ (*OED*, *EDD*).

127 For the text, see Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 339–70.

128 Cf. *Brana* in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra*.

129 Cf. Beowulf severing Grendel’s arm.

In chapter 9 we learn of troll-women besieging *Heiðarskóg* 'Heath's Forest' in Norway,¹³⁰ to which Óláfr Tryggvason had recently brought Christianity. There were three female trolls, two of them young and the third very large.¹³¹ The very large one was hairy all over like a grey bear. Walking with them was a *mikinn mann, ef mann skyldi kalla* 'a great man, if man he could be so called', along with two boy-trolls. He held a drawn sword which was *svá bjart, at sindra þótti af* 'so bright that slag/cinders seemed to come from it'.¹³² The troll-man and troll-woman defeated the first group of men who were sent to kill them.

In chapter 10, Þorsteinn and his companion *Styrkárr* 'Strengthened' were next to try. They skied over mountains and came to a refuge-hut by a lake. After spotting and pursuing one of the younger females as she carried water from the lake, Þorsteinn pierced the door of the trolls' sturdy hall with a spear. He entered and, as noted earlier,¹³³ came to a bed-closet where *brann ljós á kertistiku* 'a light burned on a candlestick'.¹³⁴

Inside he saw a hairy, blue-black troll-woman lying in bed (she is evidently the larger female mentioned earlier). She was dressed in a shift that seemed to have been *þvegin í mannablóði* 'washed in men's blood'.¹³⁵ She was sound asleep beneath a shield and sword that hung above her. Þorsteinn took the sword, pierced her with it under the left arm,¹³⁶ this being the only spot on her body that looked potentially vulnerable. He put his full weight on the hilt, so that the point stuck in the bedclothes beneath her. She awoke and groped about, whereupon Þorsteinn, in one movement, *slökkvair ljósit* 'extinguished the light' and jumped over her into the bed.¹³⁷ Assuming he had made for the door, she went the wrong way and *sæfist hon á sverðinu ok deyr* 'she is put to sleep on the sword and dies'.¹³⁸

130 The name is otherwise unattested. Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 358 n. 3 propose that it is a distortion of *Eiðaskógur* on the border between Norway and Sweden. Alternatively, I tentatively suggest that it might be a rationalization of **Heiðsskóg* 'Forest of Heavenly Brightness'.

131 Cf. Brana and her sisters in *Hálfðanar saga Brónufóstra*.

132 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 359. Cf. Surtr.

133 See Chapter 3 of this book.

134 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 360.

135 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 360.

136 A sexual euphemism?

137 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 360.

138 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 361.

Þorsteinn pulled the sword, a 'firebrand' (*brandinum*),¹³⁹ from her corpse and proceeded further inside the trolls' lair. There he saw a big man (evidently the 'great man' of the previous chapter) sitting beneath a full set of armour. There too were a fairly young female troll called *Skjalddís* 'Shield (Supernatural) Lady' and two troll-boys called *Hak* 'Hook' and *Haki* 'Hake(?)'.

Skjalddís and her father, now called *Járnskjöldr* 'Iron Shield', briefly discussed the presence of attackers. He declared that he feared only Þorsteinn and that '*svá er sem mér hangi blað fyrir auga um öll mín forlög*' "'it's as if a blade hangs before my eyes concerning all my destiny.'" ¹⁴⁰ She reassured him that Þorsteinn was unlikely to come there, before running out and tripping over her dead mother. At once, Þorsteinn severed her arm with the sword called *Skjaldvararnautr* 'Skjaldvör's Gift/Booty',¹⁴¹ a name which identifies the dead troll-woman as *Skjaldvör* 'Shield-Goddess'.¹⁴² Skjalddís fought Þorsteinn with a *skálm* 'short sword', but was defeated.

Next Þorsteinn encountered *Járnskjöldr*, who held the drawn sword, which was *bæði bjart ok bitrlegt, svá at Þorsteinn þóttist ekki slíkt sét hafa* 'both bright and sharp, such that Þorsteinn thought he had never seen such'.¹⁴³ *Járnskjöldr* wounded him in the thigh with this sword, but the sword *renndi niðr í völlinn allt upp at hjöltum* 'ran down into the ground all the way up to the hilt'.¹⁴⁴ As *Járnskjöldr* bent to withdraw it, Þorsteinn dismembered him with *Skjaldvararnautr*, before beheading him. Surprisingly, though, that was not the end of hostilities in the troll-hall.

Chapter 11 records how, when proceeding further in, Þorsteinn was seized and thrown down. *Skjaldvör* was back from the dead, and harder to deal with than before. As she stooped to bite his windpipe, Þorsteinn promised to convert to Christianity and serve Óláfr, whereupon:

139 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 361.

140 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 361–2. Cf. *Járnskjöldr*'s own sword and the wall-hung giant sword of *Beowulf*; also Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 'Is this a dagger which I see before me?' See also Binns, 'Story', 53–4.

141 For *-nautr* in sword-names, see Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 57.

142 Cf. *Vargeisa* as the goddess *Vör* in *Hjálmþés saga*, and *Sinmara* as the goddess *Eir* in *Svipdagsmál*.

143 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 362.

144 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 362.

kemr geisli inn í skálann ógurliga bjartr ok stendr þvert framan í augun kerlingar. Við þá sýn varð henni svá illt, at dró ór henni mátt ok magn allt. Hon tók þá at geispa niðörkliga. Hleypr þá ór henni spýja ok ofan í andlit Þorsteini, svá at nálíga helt honum við bana af illsku ok óþef þeim, er af stóð.¹⁴⁵

a terribly bright beam comes into the hall and streams [literally 'stands across'] in front of the old woman's eyes. At that sight she became so ill that all might and main drained from her. She then began to yawn *niðörkliga*. Then spew runs from her and down into Þorsteinn's face, so that he scarcely kept himself from death what with the wickedness and stench that arose from it.

The author adds cryptically that people thought some of her vomit must have come into contact with Þorsteinn's breast, and that, whether or not this was the cause, he did not have a wholly human form thereafter.¹⁴⁶ In any case, the pair lay between life and death, with neither able to get up.

In chapter 12, however, Styrkárr comes to the rescue.¹⁴⁷ Having beaten to death the two troll-boys, each armed with a sax, he set out to help Þorsteinn. He too dedicated himself to Christianity, on condition that he find Þorsteinn alive and well. He soon found Þorsteinn pinned beneath Skjaldvör's body, which he pulled to one side, and helped him up. Together they proceeded to break Skjaldvör's very thick neck. After cremating all the trolls, they searched the hall, but found nothing of value. They then returned home.

Chapter 13 describes how they attended a feast at which both Óláfr and Ívarr ljómi were present, the latter seated in a position of high honour. Þorsteinn turned to Ívarr *með brugðit sverðit Skjaldvararnaut ok stakk blóðreflinum fyrir brjóst honum* 'with the drawn sword Skjaldvararnautr and stuck the point before his breast'.¹⁴⁸ He told Ívarr either to receive death on its point or acknowledge his paternity. Ívarr gladly chose the latter option. Óláfr then spoke to them of Christianity and praised God for his miracles. Both Þorsteinn and Styrkárr were then baptized.

In chapter 15 a coda to these events records that the pair later re-encountered the troll-girl, now identified as *Skjaldgerðr* 'Shield-Gerðr', whom Þorsteinn had earlier chased, along with other foes.

145 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 363.

146 Cf. Glámr's curse which permanently reduces Grettir's strength.

147 Cf. Wiglaf as Beowulf's lone helper against the dragon.

148 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 365.

She revealed that she had removed her parents' treasures from their hall during the fighting and hidden them in a cellar. She then fought them even more ferociously than her mother, but Þorsteinn cut her in two with *Skjaldvararnautr*. *Styrkár*, for his part, killed *Skjaldgerðr's* husband and his brothers. They took many treasures from the cellar.

For all their differences, these parts of Þorsteinn's story are clearly akin to episodes familiar from *Beowulf*. I shall not labour all the parallels, but merely highlight the key ones for this investigation.

The extraordinarily strong, bear-like Þorsteinn corresponds to *Beowulf*, the troll-woman *Skjaldvör* to Grendel's mother, and the troll-man *Járnskjöldr* to Grendel. These are the main characters in episodes that share references or allusions to forest, mountain, lake, ice, sudden climactic light and, if my interpretation of *Beowulf* is correct, Christianity (Conversion). *Beowulf's* giant sword finds parallel in both *Skjaldvör's* sword and the—notably fiery and bright—sword of *Járnskjöldr*,¹⁴⁹ with which, despite wounding the hero (an unusual achievement), the troll-man entirely fails to save himself. That Þorsteinn does not take *Járnskjöldr's* sword in this story reflects, I suggest, its underlying identity with *Skjaldvör's* weapon, which he does take, rather as (I propose in Chapter 16) the giant sword shares an underlying identity with *Hrunting*.

Less apparent are two easily overlooked correspondences.

First is that the blade of *Járnskjöldr's* sword disappears into the ground up to its hilt (as does *Skjaldvararnautr's* through her body and into the bed). It is not inconceivable that this might be a divergent parallel to the loss of the blade of *Beowulf's* giant sword, leaving only its hilt.

Second is that two of Þorsteinn's father-figures together suggest *Yngvi-Freyr*.¹⁵⁰ First, Þorsteinn's biological father, *Ívarr ljómi* 'Ívarr (sun)beam/light' is radiant, like *Freyr*. His name not only looks akin to *Ingvarr* (*Ing-varr*) but may derive from **InhuharjaR*, **Inhwia-harjaR*

149 Given the parallels (identified below) between this story and the final dragon-episode in *Beowulf*, in which the hero bears an iron shield (2337–9) against the dragon's fiery sword-breath, the presence here of *Járnskjöldr* 'Iron Shield' is of some interest.

150 A third, a poor man who became Þorsteinn's adoptive father, is called *Krummr* 'Raven(?)'; cf. *krummi* 'crook-clawed one', a term for raven in *PTP*, 946–7. He perhaps alludes to Óðinn, the raven-god father of Þórr.

or **InguharjaR*, which would make him a late manifestation of 'Ing(vi) the warrior'.¹⁵¹ It also appears significant that Ívarr is not only identified with a *ljómi*, but connected with a giantess's sword equivalent to the *leoma*—and thereby probably the giant sword—of *Beowulf*. This connection appears purely confrontational in the story as told in *Þorsteins þáttr uxaföts*. However, a different account, in *Sörla þáttr*, records that Þorsteinn had taken Járnskjöldr's sword—it does not mention Skjaldvararnautr—and *gefit* 'given' it to Ívarr, who subsequently wielded it.¹⁵² This is perhaps the older version of events.¹⁵³ Notably, too, in Ívarr's hand this sword became a Christian weapon, which he used to lay to rest men condemned by Óðinn's magic to fight eternally, as was proven by the *blod a suerde Juars* 'blood on Ívarr's sword'.¹⁵⁴

In this regard, it is notable that a second father to Þorsteinn is, in effect, Freysteinn, the noble slave who saved him from death by exposure. Freysteinn's fairness suggests Freyr, and his name means 'Freyr-Stone' or 'Freyr's Twig'.

As such, *Þorsteinn* 'Þórr/Thunder-Stone' or 'Þórr's Twig'—who is imbued with immense strength and who was once apparently the son of at least one god of heavenly light—could well fill the role of emissary of heavenly radiance in a fight against lunar monsters. But where is the moon in this tale? It is obscured, but still, I believe, discernible in the one word I left untranslated in the quoted passage above: *niðörkliga*.

This adverb, which describes how Skjaldvör yawned after the appearance of the brilliant light in her second fight with Þorsteinn, occurs nowhere else in Old Norse literature and has puzzled commentators. The editors of the standard edition of the tale infer from the context that it must mean 'ógurlega, andstyggilega',¹⁵⁵ and it has been translated into English as 'hugely'.¹⁵⁶ Another suggestion is that it is a mistake

151 See *ANEW* s.v. *Ívarr*; *ÍO* s.v. *Ívar*, *Ívarr*. An alternative derivation, from **īwa-hariR*, makes *Ívarr* a 'yew/bow-warrior'.

152 Guðbrandr Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (ed.), *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, 3 vols (Christiania, 1860–8), I, 282.

153 Binns, 'Story', 39, however, considers it the author's misremembrance of *Þorsteins þáttr uxaföts*.

154 Guðbrandr Vigfússon and Unger, *Flateyjarbok*, I, 283.

155 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 363 n. 3.

156 Viðar Hreinsson, *Complete Sagas*, IV, 351.

for an otherwise unattested adverb **níðvirkliga*, which would mean ‘villainously’ or ‘detestably’.¹⁵⁷ The truth, I propose, is both stranger and more informative.

I interpret *niðörkliga* as a compound of either *nið* ‘dark (of) moon’ or *níð* ‘derision’, ‘scornful treatment’ + *örk* ‘ark, chest’ + *-liga* ‘-ly’. In other words, Skjaldvör yawned ‘in the manner of a dark-moon (or derision) chest’. The sense ‘derision’ (for *níð*) would be apt, given that Skjaldvör vomits on Þorsteinn.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, *nið* ‘dark (phase of the) moon’ explains more of the episode’s curious features. Especially if the unusual compound *niðörkliga* derives from a lost poetic source, we need not necessarily choose between these two possibilities.¹⁵⁹

Skjaldvör’s sudden yawning is interpretable in more than one way, which need not be mutually exclusive either. The most obvious in context is that it results from sleepiness caused by an attack by the spirits of her enemies, for only shortly earlier Járnskjöldr had explained his drowsiness in such a way: ‘*liggja á mér hugir stórra manna*’ ‘the spirits of great men are attacking me’.¹⁶⁰ But yawning and enervation at the sight of brilliant light would also be a natural response for a lunar creature, for whom this radiance would signal dawn and the approach of bedtime.¹⁶¹ It is probably no coincidence that when she lost consciousness earlier in the episode, Skjaldvör was ‘put to sleep’ (*sæfist*) on her sword—a memory, I suggest, of the sword as a solar symbol.

If Skjaldvör is a lunar creature (an idea compatible with her name),¹⁶² this could also explain both the ‘ark/chest’ and her vomiting. The element

157 ONP s.v. *?níðörkliga*.

158 On the semantics of ON *nið*, see A. Finlay, ‘*Nið*, Adultery and Feud in *Bjarnar saga hitdælakappa*’, *SBVS* 23 (1990–3), 158–78.

159 Cf. the potential ambiguity of *nið* in *Beowulf*.

160 Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 361. For other examples of this belief, see A. Heijnen, *The Social Life of Dreams: A Thousand Years of Negotiated Meanings in Iceland* (Vienna, 2013), 92–3. The same belief might explain why, in *Beowulf*, the hero’s companions fell asleep in Heorot as they waited for Grendel to arrive. For another perspective on the sleepiness of the poem’s Danes, see D. R. Barnes, ‘Folktale Morphology and the Structure of *Beowulf*’, *Speculum* 45 (1970), 416–34 at 420 (no. 3), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2853501>

161 Cf. how light put the dragons to sleep in *Gull-Þóris saga*, which may indicate that they were originally *nið* ‘waning/dark moon’ dragons like *Niðhoggr* and, arguably, *Beowulf*’s *niðdraca*; Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, *Harðar saga*, 188. Cf. also Sóti’s loss of strength when confronted by candlelight in his otherwise dark mound in *Harðar saga*.

162 ‘Moon’ is an element in numerous Old Norse kennings for ‘shield’, for which see ‘Kennings for SHIELD’, in *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*,

-örk- would be explicable by analogy with Sinmara's 'chest of rough iron' in *Svipdagsmál*, which she would open when Svipdagr presented (and possibly killed) her with a 'radiant sickle' (compare the brilliant light). In *Svipdagsmál*, this likely opening would have resulted in Svipdagr gaining possession of the sword *Lævateinn*; in the prose tale, this idea is present but distorted, Þorsteinn having already extracted *Skjaldvararnautr* from *Skjaldvör*'s body, after having taken it from above her bed. In this case, then, *Skjaldvör* is *herself* the open container.¹⁶³

Additionally, *Skjaldvör*'s remarkable return from the dead is explicable if she is (or was originally) a moon-creature, for the moon regularly appears to return from the dead as part of its cycle. This cycle could also explain the subsequent fight with *Skjaldvör*'s even stronger daughter.

Assuming *Skjaldvör* is a moon-creature, it is significant that she returned stronger after her hall had been, one imagines, plunged into complete darkness by the extinguishing of her candle and the burying of *Járnskjöldr*'s bright sword-blade deep in the ground. Her strengthening suggests that she was more powerful at this point because she had become specifically a dark-moon monster, a *nið*-monster.

The same assumption may enrich our understanding of *Skjaldvör*'s yawning and derisive vomiting. For by yawning at the light, she was *gaping* at the light. The implicitly lunar wolf *Sköll* 'Mockery' presumably also opened her mouth to mock the sun when driving it toward *Hati*, her fellow hunter; it may not be coincidental that *Skjaldvör*'s daughter, *Skjaldgerðr*, has a half-namesake in *Hríngerðr*, daughter of *Hati*.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, as we have seen, a likely Norse moon-snake with twin wolf-heads gapes at the sun-cross and probably

<http://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/db.php?if=default&table=kenning&val=SHIELD>

163 Just as, we shall find in Chapter 15 (below), *Grendel*'s mother may be too.

164 That several of this troll-family have 'Shield'-names also raises interesting questions. As noted above, there is a conceptual connection between the moon and a shield in Old Norse poetic diction. But the same is true of the sun, which is a *himintarga* 'sky-shield' in *Þórsdrápa* (see Chapter 10) and, in another source, the *skýja skjöldr* 'shield of the clouds' (Page, *Icelandic Rune Poem*, 29, 36), from the heat of which rocks and sea are protected by a shield called *Svöl* 'Cool' (*Grímnismál* 38; a notion perhaps derived from the sight of the dark moon during a solar eclipse). On this basis, did the shield above *Skjaldvör*'s bed once represent stolen sunlight? And was this solar shield originally taken from the *Skjöldingar*, the *Scyldingas* 'Shieldings' of *Beowulf*? Was her sword taken from them, too?

breathes fire on, or vomits at, Christ (implicitly the Sun) on the Gosforth Cross.¹⁶⁵

Skjaldvör's derisive vomiting, which almost killed Þorsteinn and left him permanently altered, might also parallel the fiery projectile emissions from the semi-black moon-serpent described by Gervase of Canterbury.¹⁶⁶ More strikingly, it may connect with the climactic fire-dragon, the *niðdraca* 'waning/dark moon(?) dragon', of *Beowulf*. In Skjaldvör's case, since she vomits at her defeat, her spewing might equate to the moon's unwilling return of internalized solar light and heat, or, from another perspective, the sun's repossession of its light and heat. In the *niðdraca*'s case, its response to the theft of a precious cup from its hoard is to vomit on those who stole and received this treasure. Once *wæs dæg sceacen / wyrme on willan* 'day was passed, to the worm's pleasure' (2306–7):

Ða se gæst ongan gledum spiwan,
 beorht hofu bærnan; bryneleoma stod
 eldum on andan; no ðær aht cwices
 lað lyftfloga læfan wolde.
 Wæs þæs wyrmes wig wide gesyne,
 nearofages nið, nean ond feorran,
 hu se guðsceaða Geata leode
 hatode ond hynde. (2312–9)

Then the guest/creature [i.e., the dragon] began to spew embers,¹⁶⁷ to burn bright houses/shrines; burning light stood in malice for men; the loathsome air-flier wanted to leave nothing alive there. The worm's warfare was widely seen, the narrow/dark(?)-hostile/shining/coloured one's *nið*, near and far, how the battle-scather/criminal hated¹⁶⁸ and humiliated the people of the Geatas.

The dragon, I suggest, prefigures Skjaldvör by vomiting insultingly and violently against another Þórr-like figure, Beowulf, the lord of the Geatas

165 See Chapter 10. In this connection Skjaldvör's grey hairiness may be recalled; although the author likens her to a bear, elsewhere it is normally wolves who are grey.

166 See Chapter 10. Note also CV s.v. *ími-gustr/ímu-gustr* 'giant's gust/blast', a term for 'disgust', in which the first element relates to *ím* 'embers'.

167 KB defines instances of *gled* in *Beowulf* as 'fire, flame', as does DOE, but the base sense is 'a live coal, ember' (DOE s.v. *gled* 1.a).

168 There may be a pun on *hatian* 'to become hot or inflamed, be oppressed by heat'.

and the recipient of the stolen cup. As *Skjáldvör* vomits like a *nið/níð*-vessel, so the *niðdraca* vomits embers identified with *nið*.¹⁶⁹ In the quoted passage this word's apposition to *wig* 'warfare' indicates the sense 'hostility' primarily. But at the same time, the dragon's *wig* is manifest as *bryneleoma* 'burning light', which hints at a secondary link between *nið*, the *niðdraca* and radiance, here presumably a fire (potentially of apocalyptic darkness) that reduces buildings to blackened ruins.¹⁷⁰ Should the distinction between a dragon and a troll-woman or giantess be deemed too great for this proposed parallel to be significant, a detail from *Völuspá* 50 may be noted; it describes how, at Ragnarøk, the gaping *Miðgarðsormr* (possibly shown vomiting fire on the Gosforth Cross) writhes *í jötunmóði* 'in giant-rage', *jötunn* (cognate with OE *eoten*), which fundamentally means 'one with sustenance for eating or authority over eating',¹⁷¹ elsewhere being a term for a humanoid giant.¹⁷² It appears that, in Old Norse mythology, snakes, wolves and giants could blend.

To a degree, *Beowulf's* vomiting ember-dragon may also foreshadow *Vargeisa*, the composite ember-monster from whose mouth *Hjálmpér* acquired *Snarvendill*, the radiant sword that parallels the giant-sword. For not only does the dragon spew embers, which *Vargeisa* also implicitly contained, but the resulting *bryneleoma* that *stod* 'stood' grimly echoes the propitious *leoma* that *stod* in the *niðsele* at the moment of *Grendel's* mother's beheading. I argued earlier that a likely source of that *leoma* is the giant sword, which is paired with a *beadoleama*

169 Cashford, *Moon*, 183–4 refers to myths that describe 'soot, ash, blood and mud on the moon', due to the moon's smudged and sometimes bloody appearance. For example, according to an Inuit story, 'Moon's light is always pale because his wick burned down to embers in the beginning, and his light is the cold light of winter. Whenever he disappears from the sky in winter, he crosses the sea of ice with his dogs to hunt food for the dead humans in the realm of death. But Sun gives out light and heat, especially in summer when Moon becomes pale in her light, since in the beginning her wick of flame kept on blazing' (*ibid.*, 184); see also Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, 60–1; Witzel, *Origins*, 146. Note, too, the quoted passage's association of the sun and moon with burning candles.

170 Cf. the *headotorht* 'battle-bright' warcry with which *Beowulf* challenges the dragon (2553).

171 Battaglia, 'Cannibalism in *Beowulf*', 145.

172 Note especially *SnEGylf*, 35, where a giant-builder, who had demanded the sun and moon and *Freyja* as payment, flies *í jötunmóð* 'into a giant-rage'; the same text paraphrases and quotes *Völuspá* 50 on 50–1. The potential relationship of *Grendel's* mother to the Babylonian *Tiamat* and the Biblical *Leviathan* should also be noted (see Chapter 15).

'battle-light', Hrunting. The implicit image of the dragon spewing a fiery sword is reinforced by a subsequent description of the dragon's flames as *hildeleoman* 'battle-lights' (2583; quoted in context above), a word, unique to *Beowulf*, which earlier described a sword (1143). That we are justified in briefly picturing the dragon's flames as swords shining in the darkness of night is further indicated by the dragon's description as *hioroweallende middelnihum* 'sword-welling in the middle of the night' (2781), shortly after a reference to Beowulf's dragon-injuring sword (2777–8).¹⁷³

Moreover, in its hating and humiliating (*hatode ond hynde*), the dragon of *Beowulf* also appears to prefigure the wolves *Hati* 'Hater' and *Sköll* 'Mockery', the object of whose hate and mockery, and their eventual prey, was the sun (compare again the snake with twin wolf-heads that gapes and vomits fire at Christ the Sun on the Gosforth Cross). The object of the *niðdraca*'s wrath was the *beorht hofu* 'bright houses/shrines' of *Beowulf*. Given the precedent of Heorot as a bright, implicitly solar hall, which was destined to burn down and which stood exposed, in contrast to Grendel's concealed, secret *niðsele* 'waning/dark-moon(?) hall', Beowulf's 'bright houses' may also have a solar aspect. Rather similarly, they stood in contrast to the *niðdraca*'s *dryhtsele dyrnne* 'secret splendid hall' (2320) and were also destined to burn down.

If this interpretation holds, the stolen cup of *Beowulf* may, on one level, symbolize—or once have symbolized—the sun or sunlight which was taken from a dark-moon dragon's earthen den and presented to Beowulf, the human representative of a sun-god.¹⁷⁴ This (*searo*) *since fah* 'work of art adorned with treasure' (2217), this *fæted wæge* 'plated cup' (2282), this *sincfæt* 'treasure-vessel' (2231, 2300), this *drincfæt dyre*

173 Cf. the fire-breathing dragon with a sword-like tongue, or with a sword in its hand, that swallowed St. Margaret; D. Ogden, *Dragons, Serpents, and Slayers in the Classical and Early Christian Worlds: A Sourcebook* (Oxford, 2013), 245–6; M. Clayton and H. Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St Margaret* (Cambridge, 1994), 162–3, 204–5.

174 Panchenko, 'Scandinavian Background' adduces evidence indicating that ancient Europeans believed that the sun travelled in a cup *by night*; also recall the reference to *Sólkatla* 'Sun Cauldron' in the passage from *Sólarljóð* involving the likely recovery from a burial mound of a solar symbol possessed by a lunar(?) dwarf (see Chapter 13). For a golden cup or bowl as a solar symbol, see also *MIFL*, motifs A722.1 'Sun's night journey in golden goblet' and A724.2 'The sun a golden bowl on the rim of which sits a peacock; both bowl and peacock are in a crystal box, which rests on a flying chariot'.

'precious drinking vessel' (2306) stolen from the *lyftfloga* 'air-flier', would then parallel the *lyftfæt leohtlic* 'radiant air-vessel' stolen from the solar creature by the Grendel-like moon-creature of *Riddle 29*. Alternatively, though less likely, in addition to possibly being a plausible portent of impending death and apocalypse (a *poculum mortis* 'cup of death'),¹⁷⁵ the presumably silver- or gold-plated cup could suggest a crescent or half-moon.¹⁷⁶

Among the implicit parallels drawn between the dragon-episode and the poem's earlier personages, events and themes, those between the dragon and the sword-thief Grendel appear clear.¹⁷⁷ So does the resonance of the presentation of a bright, stolen treasure to an elderly lord. Thus the poet surely calls to mind the fiery-eyed Grendel and his mother when describing how the dragon had *gledum forgrunden* 'ground to pieces with embers' Beowulf's stronghold (2335) and *gledum forgrunden* Wiglaf's shield (2677).¹⁷⁸ He also implicitly links the dragon and Grendel as humiliators: as the dragon *hynde* 'humiliated', so Grendel had inflicted *hynðu* 'humiliation' (166, 277, 475, 593). Most strikingly, when describing how *Frea sceawode / fira fyrngeweorc forman siðe* 'The lord [Beowulf] gazed on the ancient work of living beings/men [i.e., the cup]

175 On this concept in Anglo-Saxon literature, see C. Brown, 'Poculum Mortis in Old English', *Speculum* 15 (1940), 389–99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2853458>; H. Magennis, 'The Cup as Symbol and Metaphor in Old English Literature', *Speculum* 60 (1985), 517–36.

176 Cf. Cashford, *Moon*, 314–5, 320; J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd edn. (London, 1996), 178; Briggs, 'Symbols', 143 observes that a golden cup often has symbolic significance in fairy tales. Magennis, 'Cup as Symbol', however, makes no mention of solar or lunar symbolism in *Beowulf* or other Anglo-Saxon texts.

177 Cf. DuBois, 'Dragon', 822: 'The dragon story seems to me a variation upon the Grendel story'.

178 Cf. *forgrand gramum; ond nu wið Grendel sceal ...* 'I ground fierce ones to pieces; and now against Grendel I shall ...' (424). The name *Grendel/Grindel* suggests, and may be etymologically related to, OE *grindan* 'to grind' (*KB*, 467). Cf. also the giantesses, including Grendel's mother, associated with maelstroms, and the connection between male barley-giants and milling in Norse myth (see Chapter 8). For the likelihood that, after cremation, human bones were ground—in effect, milled like grain—and deposited in water in ancient Scandinavian mortuary ritual, see A. Kaliff, *Fire, Water, Heaven and Earth: Ritual Practice and Cosmology in Ancient Scandinavia: An Indo-European Perspective* (Stockholm, 2007), 135–46. In this light, it appears that the passages of *Svipdagr* through the maelstrom in *Svipdagsmál* and of *Beowulf* through the churning waters of the mere might be interpretable as symbolic deaths through disintegration, and that their emersion symbolizes rebirth.

for the first time' (2285–6), the poet recalls the moment when another *frea*, Hroðgar, *sceawode* 'gazed' at the giant-sword's hilt, the *enta ærgeweorc* 'ancient work of giants'. Accordingly, if the hilt is solar, the cup may well be, too—in which case the *niðdraca* that guards it so jealously in the earth is all the more likely to be a 'waning/dark-moon dragon'.

Hyndla at the 'Darkness of Darknesses'

The Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð* refers to Norse dynasties and personages mentioned in *Beowulf*, but merits attention here especially because of the identities of the two disputants it describes, one of whom could well be a giantess of the dark moon.

Hyndluljóð concerns a meeting between the goddess Freyja and the giantess *Hyndla* 'Little Hound/Bitch', who probably descends from a certain *Viðólfur* 'Wood-Wolf' (33)—note the association of giant and wolf again. At the *røkr røkra* 'twilight of twilights/darkness of darknesses' (1), Freyja, who rides a *glóar, gullinbursti* 'glowing, golden-bristled' boar (7), calls on the cave-dwelling *Hyndla* to wake up and ride with her to *Valhöll*, Óðinn's hall. *Hyndla*, however, refuses to mount one of her own wolves. Freyja therefore proposes that they talk where they are. She wants to learn from *Hyndla* the ancestry of a certain Óttarr, whom *Hyndla* has identified, despite Freyja's denial, as the goddess's boar-mount. Freyja asks in particular about members of dynasties including the *Skjöldungar* (the *Scyldingas* of *Beowulf*), the *Skilfingar* (the *Scylfingas* of *Beowulf*) and the *Ylfingar* (the *Wylfingas* of *Beowulf*) (11). *Hyndla* proceeds to enumerate Óttarr's forebears, who include, among many others, *Hálfðan, hæstr Skjöldunga* 'highest of the *Skjöldungar*' (14), who corresponds to *Healfdene*, father of Hroðgar in *Beowulf*. Óttarr's relatives also apparently include Freyr, whose marriage to Gerðr is mentioned (30).

When Freyja asks for a drink to fortify her boar's memory, the verbal exchange between goddess and giantess ends acrimoniously. Not all details of the poem's conclusion are clear, but it appears that *Hyndla* casts (or threatens to cast) fire at Freyja¹⁷⁹—or vice versa—before declaring '*Hyr sé ec brenna, enn hauðr loga*' "'I see fire burning, and the earth ablaze'" (49), asserting that most people must endure death, and

179 Cf. the arson planned by the troll-woman *Forað* (possibly a personification of the dark moon) in chapter 5 of *Ketils saga hængs*; *FSN*, II, 171.

defiantly commanding that Óttarr be brought a poisoned drink. Freyja, however, triumphantly rejects Hyndla's curse and asks all the gods to aid Óttarr.

Although *Hyndluljóð* makes no explicit mention of sun or moon, several details raise the distinct possibility that both may be relevant to this discussion. The *røkr røkra* mentioned in the opening stanza could well suggest a night of the dark moon. This interpretation would accord with Hyndla's slumber and reluctance to move, if she were a lunar being (compare the deathly sleep of Skjáldvör and Grendel). Such a nature cannot be proven, but Hyndla's association with wolves and possible fieriness call to mind Grendel's mother. Freyja, for her part, is implicitly associated with the sun or moon through her glowing, golden-bristled boar, which presumably cast enough light to admit the possibility of she and Hyndla travelling in what was otherwise pitch blackness; it also recalls the heavenly radiance emitted by Frey's similar mount. Additionally, the fire that Hyndla sees burning on the earth could be an image of the sun rising over the horizon at dawn, which would turn her to stone—recall the fates of Hríngerðr and Alviðs.¹⁸⁰

Hyndluljóð also shares with *Beowulf* an interest in boar-warriors.¹⁸¹ Óttarr, who as Freyja's mount is implicitly her sexual partner (like Freyr), took the form of a glowing, gold-bristled boar,¹⁸² a counterpart of Frey's. *Beowulf* mentions a Geatish warrior called *Eofor* 'Boar' who killed King Ongenþeo(w) by breaking his *entiscne helm* 'giantish helm' with an *ealdsweord eotonisc* 'giantish old-sword' (2485–9; 2977–81), for which he was rewarded with marriage to the daughter of Hygelac. In addition, *Beowulf* describes warriors wearing helmets adorned with shining figurines or other images of boars, sometimes explicitly golden.¹⁸³ These are introduced early in the poem in the description of the approach of Beowulf and his men to Heorot:

180 The passage in question may be deliberately polysemous. The fire may also suggest the flames of Ragnarøk and the blaze that accompanied the movements of Þórr's goat-drawn chariot.

181 For another Old Norse text describing a boar-warrior, see *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, chapter 8; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 403.

182 In stanza 7 Freyja calls it *Hildisvíni* 'Battle-Swine' and says it was made by the dwarves *Dáinn* 'Deceased One' and *Nabbi* 'Bump'.

183 On boars and boar-helmets in *Beowulf*, see A. T. Hatto, 'Snake-Swords and Boar-Helms in *Beowulf*', *ES* 38 (1957), 145–60; A. Metcalf, 'Ten Natural Animals in *Beowulf*', *NM* 64 (1963), 378–89 at 381–4.

eoforlic scionon
ofer hleorbergan, gehroden golde,
fah ond fyrheard (303–5)

boar-bodies [i.e., boar-figurines] shone over cheek-guards, adorned with gold, shining and fire-hard(ened).

To this extent, at least, Beowulf appears analogous to Óttarr. But it may be noteworthy, too, that Beowulf's boar-protection is mentioned immediately before he ventures into the mere to fight Grendel's mother: his shining helmet is *besette swinlicum* 'embellished with boar-bodies' (1453), presumably in this case plate-images of boars or boar-helmeted warriors.¹⁸⁴ Albeit in different ways, both Beowulf and Óttarr find themselves under the cover of a shining, protective boar or boars associated with Yngvi-Freyr or Freyja, before confronting a hostile, wolfish giantess associated (if my thesis is correct) with the waning or dark moon. And they do so in episodes that arguably both conclude with the giantess's defeat and the appearance of the sun.¹⁸⁵

Þórgunna, Mána-Ljótur and the Half-Moon

A giantess (of sorts) associated with the moon appears in the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Eyrbyggja saga* 'Saga of the Dwellers of Eyr', along with a reference to (it appears) a hideous lunar associate.¹⁸⁶ The episode in question concerns a Hebridean Christian woman of giant stature called Þórgunna, an inauspicious moon-portent and assaults on the living by the undead.

Chapter 51 of the saga describes the burial of Þórgunna, whose instructions about burning her belongings after her death were

184 Boar-crested helmets are shown on a seventh-century bronze die, probably for making helmet-plates, from Torslunda, Sweden; *KB*, xv (fig. 6). Beowulf and Hroðgar are also associated with the boar through the latter's gift of an *eoforheafodsegn* 'boar-head banner' (2152). Hroðgar's link with the boar, together with his lordship of the stag-hall Heorot, and his gift of horses to Beowulf (1035–45), further strengthens his likely links with Yngvi-Freyr, as these are that god's three totemic animals.

185 Conversely, Krappe, 'Yngvi-Frey', who relates *Ing* to the Irish god *Aengus (mac Oc)*, claims that either divinity had a human counterpart (the Danish King Fróði III and Diarmaid Ua Duibne, respectively) who was slain by a human in the shape of a boar or, in Fróði's case, a 'sea-cow'.

186 Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson (ed.), *Eyrbyggja saga, Grœnlendinga sǫgur, ÍF 4* (Reyjavík, 1935).

flouted, despite her warnings that trouble would result. Various young manuscripts of the saga record that as she was laid in the ground, people heard her complaining of cold legs to a certain *Mána-Ljótur* ‘Moon/Moon’s Ugly (One)’.

In chapter 52 we read that on the evening of the corpse-bearers’ return, people gathered around the fire at a farmstead at Fróðá in Iceland. On the wall they saw a *tungl hálf* ‘half-moon’, which went backwards around the house and *andsælis* ‘contrary to the course of the sun’; one of those present declared that it was *urðarmána* ‘fate’s moon’ and that it forboded the death of men.¹⁸⁷ It was present every evening for a whole week.

Subsequent chapters detail a series of mysterious deaths followed by revenant-hauntings, until the undead are finally exorcized on the evening before Candlemas.

The Old One and the Pitchforker, Again

In Chapter 10 of this study, when analyzing Norse myths about sun-hunting wolves, we met the giantess known simply as *in aldna* ‘the old one’ and her most formidable male offspring, the *tungls tjúgari* ‘moon’s pitchforker’ (if my translation is correct). They feature at the heart of *Völuspá* (40–1), the most accomplished surviving poem of Old Norse mythology, and they warrant further examination here as potentially highly significant counterparts to Grendel’s mother and Grendel.

The moon’s pitchforker has much in common with Grendel. Both are:

- (a) Notorious, lone, male offspring of an anonymous old giantess.
- (b) Part giant, part wolf. The pitchforker in *Völuspá* is an offspring of Fenrir in troll-form. In Snorri’s commentary on this passage in *Gylfaginning*, *Mánagarmr*, the equivalent to the lunar pitchforker, is both *jötunn* and *vargr*. Correspondingly, the troll-like Grendel—whose father, admittedly, is unknown—is both *eoten* and *wearg* (*heorowearh*). Grendel, furthermore, is the son of a *brimwylf* ‘sea she-wolf’, a *grundwyrgen* ‘a female

¹⁸⁷ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, *Eyrbyggja saga*, 145–6.

ground/depth-*wearg*', with whom he inhabits wolf-haunted country. Additionally, he preys on a stag in the form of Heorot.

- (c) Eaters of dying or dead men.
- (d) Reddeners of halls associated with divinity. Grendel leaves Heorot, the hall of the friends of Ing, *blode fah ... heorodreorig* 'coloured with blood ... sword-bloody' (*Beowulf* 934–5).
- (e) Implicitly bearers of forked weapons, which they both presumably used to assault divine halls. Grendel's weapons are one or both of his terrible arms, one of which is described as an *unheoru* 'un/bad-sword' with steel-like nail-spurs (985–6), which, I suggest, are comparable to the prongs of a large fork. The reinforced door of Heorot, hall of the friends of Ing, gave way as soon as Grendel touched it with his hands (721–4).
- (f) Last but certainly not least, associated (in my view) with the moon, especially in its dark phase.

For her part, 'the old one', the lunar pitchforker's mother, has similarities to Grendel's mother. Both are:

- (a) Wolfish giantesses.
- (b) Old. Grendel's mother had watched the waters of the mere for *hund missera* 'one hundred seasons' (1498).¹⁸⁸
- (c) Mothers of comparable sons. Possibly, Grendel's wolfish mother had also spawned the wolves which haunted the land around her mere, just as the lunar pitchforker's mother had spawned the race of wolves.
- (d) Nameless.
- (e) Inhabitants of similar places.

188 Note also, with regard to the previous point, that ON *vitnir*, a poetic term for 'wolf', means literally 'watcher'. Other creatures of the mere—functionally comparable to the wolves of *Beowulf* and the guard-dogs (watch-dogs) of *För Skírnis* and *Svipdagsmál*—are also watchers. On the slopes of headlands around the mere men saw: *nicras licgean, / ða on undernmael oft bewitigað / sorhfulne sið on seglrade, / wyrmas ond wildeor* 'Nicors lying, those that in the morning often watch a sorrowful journey on the sail-road, snakes and wild beasts' (*Beowulf* 1427–9). Another watching *wyrm* in *Beowulf* is the climactic dragon, which *hord beweotode* 'watched over a hoard' (2212). Another watching 'wolf' is *Beowulf*, who stayed awake for Grendel's arrival in Heorot.

With regard to this last point (e), a key detail which has obscured these two characters' similarities from scholars is the ostensible *difference* between their locations: 'the old one' lived in *Járnviðr* 'Iron-Wood/Forest', whereas Grendel's mother inhabited a marshy mere. The two places are, however, reconcilable.

The hellish mere inhabited by Grendel's mother has many unnerving aspects, which together create its phantasmagoric horror. Part inland sea, part turbulent, grasping whirlpool, it is also part wooded fen. Indeed, the fenny, marshy aspect of her environs is prominent. Thus, her *dygel lond* 'secret/hidden land' (1357) included *moras ... fen ond fæsten* 'moors ... fen and fastness' (103–4), *fenhopu* 'fen-retreats' (764), *fenhleoðu* 'fen-slopes' (820), a *fenfreoðu* 'fen-refuge' (851), *fenne* 'fen' (1295), a *frecne fengelad* 'dangerous fen-passage' (1359), *myrcan mor* 'mirky moor' (1405) and *enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad* 'narrow paths restricted to a single file, an unknown [i.e., untried] treacherous passage across water' (1410). Its wooded nature is also emphasized: it was overhung by *hrinde bearwas* 'hoar-frosted groves' (1363), a *wudu wyrtum fæst* 'a wood fixed by roots' (1364), and associated with a *holtwudu* 'copse-wood' (1369), a *fyrgeholt* 'mountain-copse' (1395), *fyrgebeammas* 'mountain-trees' (1414) and a *wynleasne wudu* 'joyless wood' (1416). Additionally, it was the site of an eerie nocturnal fire strongly suggestive of *ignis fatuus*, a will-o'-the-wisp (1365–6), a phenomenon of marshes often said to be bluish. In short, Grendel's mother inhabited one of Denmark's wooded bogs.

So too, most likely, did 'the old one' of *Járnviðr*.¹⁸⁹ *Járnviðr* was probably the name of a carr, a wooded bog, from which bog ore was extracted.¹⁹⁰ In Iron Age Scandinavia, most iron derived from bog ore (ON *rauði*, literally 'red (stuff)'),¹⁹¹ which is 'typically found in peat bogs

189 Note also the presence of *Járnviðja* beside *Ímgerðr* and *Margerðr* in a list of the names of troll-women in *SnE Skáld*, I, 112.

190 L. Einarson, 'Re-Forging the Smith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Smithing Motifs in *Völuspá* and *Völundarkviða*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2011), 163–213, <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/88>. This finding is not mentioned in the discussion of *Járnviðr* in S. Brink and J. Lindow, 'Place Names in Eddic Poetry', in C. Larrington, J. Quinn and B. Schorn (ed.), *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (Cambridge, 2016), 173–89 at 179, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316471685.010>. For a different interpretation, see SASE5-7, 149.

191 On this word, see CV and D. H. Green, *Language and History in the Early Germanic World* (Cambridge, 1998), 154–5.

and, to a lesser extent, in rivers and lakes'.¹⁹² Consequently, a wooded bog might naturally have been called 'Iron-Wood'. In *Völuspá*, *Járnviðr* is presumably a mythological equivalent to, or elevation of, the real-world toponyms *Jarnwith* and *Isarnho* in Schleswig-Holstein.¹⁹³ Such a bog might also have been a source of bog-wood, a rare form of fossilized wood. Its great hardness, attributable partly to iron in the water, perhaps encouraged both the place-name and the notion of the unbreakable twig-sword.¹⁹⁴ Since trees overhung Grendel's mere (*ofer þæm hongiað ... oferhelmað* 1363–4), branches and twigs would have fallen into its waters, as they did into the black water in the aforementioned *Blickling* homily. Sometimes, too, whole trees would have been lost to bogs. In addition, if there was a heavy concentration of iron in Grendel's mere—the bottom of which concealed iron weaponry and armour—this could have turned its sucking waters reddish brown, so contributing to their pollution, prior to cleansing by *Beowulf*.

Furthermore, *Beowulf's* repeated references to *fen(n)* 'fen' are suggestive of the mythological wolf *Fenrir* in *Völuspá* 40, to whose brood the lunar pitchforker belongs. The etymology of *Fenrir* is uncertain, but it probably contains the cognate ON *fen*, which would presumably make *Fenrir* a fen-dweller. *Fenrisúlfr*, the later-attested name for this monster, is explicable as a compound of ON *fen* 'fen' + *hrís* 'brushwood' + *úlfr* 'wood'. *Fenrir*, it appears, is a wolf of fenland brushwood, and therefore at home in *Járnviðr*.¹⁹⁵

I therefore propose that, to add to the potential correspondence between *Beowulf's* *niðdraca* and *Völuspá's* *Niðhoggr*, Grendel has a

192 G. Bowles, R. Bowker and N. Samsonoff, 'Viking Expansion and the Search for Bog Iron', *Platforum* 12 (2011), 25–37 at 26. Might this fact partly explain the deposition of iron weapons in bogs and lakes—to replenish the iron which had been taken from them? The practice of depositing weapons in such places predates the Iron Age, however; see e.g., R. Bradley, *The Passage of Arms: An Archaeological Analysis of Prehistoric Hoards and Votive Deposits* (Cambridge, 1990); K. Kristiansen, 'The Tale of the Sword: Swords and Swordfighters in Bronze Age Europe', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 21 (2002), 319–32; D. Yates and R. Bradley, 'Still Water, Hidden Depths: The Deposition of Bronze Age Metalwork in the English Fenland', *Antiquity* 84 (2010), 405–15.

193 On *Isarnho*, see E. Benesch, 'Der *Isarnho*', *Jahrbuch für das ehemalige Amt Bordesholm* 1 (1999), 59–93, http://www.geschichtsverein-bordesholm.de/Veroeffentlichungen/Jahrbuecher/J01_3_Benesch_Isarnho.pdf

194 *OED* attests to 'ironwood' denoting the extremely hard wood of various trees, but not before the mid-seventeenth century.

195 On the name *Fenrir*, see Simek, *Dictionary*, 81; *ANEW* s.v.; *ÍO* s.v.

likely counterpart in the ‘moon’s pitchforker’,¹⁹⁶ and Grendel’s mother in ‘the old one’ of *Járnviðr* in *Völuspá*. Concomitantly, both Grendel and the lunar pitchforker appear likely to be equivalent protagonists of myths about the taking of sunlight for a lunar giantess, personified respectively as ‘the old one’ and Grendel’s mother. Underlining the likely lunar nature of the pitchforker and Grendel is their apparent kinship, as sunlight-seizing fork-wielders, with the fork-bearing Man in the Moon.¹⁹⁷

Three further Old Norse saga-episodes appear noteworthy, as each involves what probably is, or was originally, a lunar forker. The first comes from a now-familiar source of neglected *Beowulf*-parallels: *Hjálmpés saga*.

Ýma and the Boatforker

In Chapter 7 of this study we left the adventures of the hero of *Hjálmpés saga* at the point where his formidable companion Hörðr—himself a *Beowulf*-analogue—had killed all nine sisters of the troll-woman Ýma ‘Embers’. What concerns us here is what happened next.

The end of chapter 12 describes how the men walked along the shore until Hjálmpér spotted a house up on a cliff. They went inside and found a bed, a table and chairs, and a barrel, from which they drank. Once Hjálmpér and Ölvir were off-guard, Hörðr went out and locked them inside. Hjálmpér shouted accusations of betrayal (wrongly) and tried to cut his way out with *Snarvendill*, but the marvellous sword would not bite. So the captives sat quietly inside.

Chapter 13 records that Hörðr walked further along the shore. He saw a large rock *í fjörunni* ‘on the foreshore’ (or ‘in the ebb-tide’) and got up on to it:

Hann litast um ok sér, hvar risi einn ógnarligr kom fram á bjargit ok var eigi sveinsligr yfirlits, því at engan þóttist hann slíkan sét hafa sakir stórskorins

196 This is *not* to say that Grendel’s severed arm is imagined *as* a pitchfork. As likely counterparts, the similar but different forked tools of these two monsters rather reflect the capacity of myth to combine diachronic continuity with synchronic variation.

197 In the Middle English poem ‘The Man in the Moon’, the Man bears his burden on a *bot-forke* ‘boatfork’ (2) (see below) and leans on a *forke* ‘fork’ (19).

höfuðs. Hann hafði háva stöng í hendi ok fram ór flein tvíeggjaðan, fjögurra álna langan. Hann tók niðr at fjörinni, þá hann stóð á bjarginu.¹⁹⁸

He looks around himself and sees where a terrible giant came forward onto the cliff, and he was not boyish in appearance, because he [i.e., Hörðr] thought he had never seen the like when it came to [the giant's] large-boned head. He [i.e., the giant] had a tall pole in his hand and a two-edged spike (stuck) out from it, four ells long. He extended it down to the foreshore/ebb-tide when he stood on the cliff.

The giant, who is anonymous in the saga but called *Skrimmir* in the corresponding *ríma*,¹⁹⁹ asks who has killed his young girls (i.e., Ýma's sisters). Hörðr says he did and asks for the giant's protection. They converse and Hörðr asks him to lower the forked pole, so that he can grab it. The giant replies that he can easily do that because he has previously driven its point through ships and dragged them up to his position. What is effectively a tug-of-war ensues, with the giant heaving upwards at one end of the pole and Hörðr desperately resisting on the other. At length, *jötunninn* 'the giant' *slapp* 'slipped' and fell back. Hörðr then fooled him into stretching his neck out over the cliff and extending the pole again, whereupon Hörðr seized it and pulled the giant off the cliff, breaking all his bones. Hörðr then ran up the cliff and came to a large cave. Ýma was there and begged for her life, which Hörðr granted. He put her in charge of the cave, which contained the giant's treasures, from which he took some gold. She told him to call on her if he ever needed help.

As the father of the nine sisters who may well personify waves, the unnamed giant may well correspond to Ægir/Gymir. As the giant is also the father of Ýma (the likely double of Margerðr), this would strengthen her correspondence to Gerðr, daughter of Gymir.

Hörðr's tussle with the unnamed giant echoes, I suggest, Beowulf's arm-wrestle with Grendel. The former giant's huge pole—evidently a boathook with a bifurcated head comprising one straight and one curved prong (its twin 'edges')—corresponds broadly, in my view, to Grendel's arm and hand with nails like steel. Rather as Beowulf engages in a furious bout of arm-wrestling that causes Grendel's death by

198 FSN, IV, 211.

199 It will be recalled that *Skrimmir* is the husband of *Mána* 'Moon' in *Sörla saga sterka*, and that his name might indicate a weak light.

separating him from his forked arm, so Hörðr struggles with the giant, takes control of his forked pole and thereby kills him.

The saga-giant's boathook, like Grendel's arm, is probably also a counterpart of the Man in the Moon's fork. As the saga-giant is both a stander and a walker who catches and lifts wooden ships on his boathook, so in the Middle English *Mon in the mone*:

Mon in the mone stond and strit;
On his bot-forke his burthen he bereth. (1-2)²⁰⁰

The Man in the Moon stands and strides; on his boatfork²⁰¹ his burden he bears.

This precise parallel is reinforced by the observation that both saga-giant and Man use their boatforks to steal wood, albeit in different ways.

Consequently, the saga-giant himself appears to correspond to the Man in the Moon.²⁰² For her part, his wolfish daughter may relate to the Man's dog. This identification of the unnamed giant can explain:

- (a) The saga-episode's cliff, as the moon appears to have low-lying seas.
- (b) The giant's close link with the sea and its ebb-tide, which the moon commands.
- (c) The giant's fathering of nine ship-destroying sisters, assuming they personify waves, as the moon governs the tides.
- (d) The giant's remarkably large-boned head; compare the monster called *Quasi Caput Luna* and my remarks on Grendel's huge and extraordinary head at the end of this chapter.
- (e) The dead giant's falling into the sea; compare the submergence of the dead Moon in the waters of the pool in *The Dead Moon*, and (if his dark lunar aspect is accepted) Grendel's presence in the depths of a Hell-like mere.

²⁰⁰ Davies, *Medieval English Lyrics*, 71.

²⁰¹ Assuming this interpretation is correct, *MED*'s entry for *bot-forke*, 'a fork or forked stick for carrying a bundle of thorns, etc. [?From *bot* (vr. of *bat*) club; ?from *butte* bundle.]', needs revision.

²⁰² Whether he or Grendel stands in any relationship to the mythological background of OE *garsecg* 'ocean' — literally perhaps 'spear-man' — is unknown.

This same identification also reveals humour in the giant's slipping, as the Middle English poem continues: *It is mucho wonder that he na down slit* 'It's a great wonder that he doesn't slip down' (3). In the saga, he does!²⁰³

Ýma and her father probably also correspond, albeit inexactly, to 'the old one' and the 'moon's pitchforker' of *Völuspá*. That Ýma is here the forker's newly deflowered daughter is an obvious variance (Gerðr is similarly Gymir's daughter), but a switch to put the male in charge of the female would not be surprising and, in any case, the difference does not override the similarities. Rather as 'the old one' gave birth to Fenrir's brood, so Ýma has a grey beast (probably a wolf) between her legs²⁰⁴—a wolf, furthermore, which is temporarily stretched by a sword that similarly conferred both pleasure and pain, as was Fenrir. The greyness of Ýma's wolf-hair is also suggestive of the age of 'the old one'. And rather as the *Völuspá*'s trollish pitchforker probably stole sunlight (from a solar barque?)²⁰⁵ on his fork, quite likely for 'the old one' (a probable moon-giantess), so the saga's boatforker seized ships (solar barques?) on his boathook, presumably at least partly to provide for Ýma.

The likely relevance of Ýma (Íma) and the giant to 'the old one' and her lunar pitchforker is further shown by a variant of *Völuspá* 40 preserved in the Uppsala manuscript of Snorri's *Prose Edda*.²⁰⁶ Instead of the idiom *einna nokkurr* 'a certain (notable) one', which refers to a masculine character, this manuscript has *Íma nokkur* 'a certain Íma', in which *nokkur* is grammatically feminine. Like the same text's *tregari* 'griever' in place of *tjúgari*, this is an inferior reading, but an informative one.

Finally, Ýma's apparent origin as a lunar giantess may explain characteristics of her pre-eminent sister (and likely double) Margerðr, and therefore, by extension, Gerðr. As noted earlier, Margerðr was a hunchback with a single eye in the middle of her forehead—qualities which suggest to me the moon in its gibbous phase (Latin *gibbus*

203 Cf. also the Moon's slipping in *The Dead Moon*.

204 Grey is also the colour of the *gránserks mána* 'grey shirt of Máni [the moon]', a kenning for 'sky' in a skaldic verse by Skúli Þorsteinsson; *PTP*, 367–8; *SnESkald*, I, 39.

205 *MIFL*, motif A723 'Boat of the sun'; Dubois, 'Mythic Sun', 212. See also Chapter 12 and the discussion of the Bedale sword-pommel in Chapter 16. It might be relevant, too, that the beasts of Grendel's mere were probably a danger to ships; see *KB*, 204 n. to 1428 f.

206 Heimir Pálsson, *Snorri Sturluson*, 22–3.

'humped'), another personification of which we shall encounter below in the form of a male hunchback called Kolr.

Two More Male Forkers and a Sword of Lunar Waning

King Dagr and the Hayforker

Chapter 18 of *Ynglinga saga* records the strange death of King *Dagr* 'Day', a worshipper and likely euhemerization of Freyr.²⁰⁷ He waged a vengeful war on Gotland (Jutland) after a *karl* 'common/old man'—perhaps Óðinn, who adopts this disguise elsewhere—of that country had stoned a sparrow which fed on his land *á Vörva* (probably originally 'at the **vör* "shore"'). This bird used to bring Dagr news of many things.²⁰⁸ As evening fell, Dagr was riding across a river on his way back to his ships when a *verkþræll* 'work-slave' (Óðinn again?) ran from a wood onto the riverbank and hurled a *heyttjúga* 'hayfork' into the king's company.²⁰⁹ It hit Dagr in the head, killing him. An accompanying stanza from Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's possibly ninth-century *Ynglingatal* 'Tally of the Ynglingar' calls Dagr the *valteins ... spakfrømuðr* 'wise-advancer of the slaughter-twig' (i.e., the sword and/or a sacrificial twig of divination). It also describes the hayfork, which was aimed at Dagr, as the *sløngupref sleipnis verðar* 'slung-grasp of Sleipnir's meal'. As Sleipnir was Óðinn's horse, this may implicate Óðinn in the killing.

This episode contains no parallel to the old giantess of *Völuspá*, but it does feature a murderous pitchforker who kills a personification of day, which is defined by sunlight. He invites comparison with the lunar pitchforker of *Völuspá*, the Man in the Moon (similarly a low-status workman), and the giant with the boathook in *Hjálmpés saga*.²¹⁰ Here the slave may be seen piercing the incarnate sun-god with a forked weapon, perhaps taken from the wood from which he emerged (possibly the

207 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 35–6. For a translation of this episode, see A. Finlay and A. Faulkes (trans.), *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla. Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Trygvason* (London, 2011), 20–1.

208 Cf. *Lokasenna* 44, in which Byggvir is disparagingly likened to such a bird at Freyr's ears.

209 Óðinn hurls a spear (or other weapon) into a host of Vanir in *Völuspá* 24.

210 Rather as the giant of *Hjálmpés saga* pierced boats on his fork while standing at the coast, so, it may be, the slave stood on the riverbank to pierce Dagr in the water.

wood of heaven,²¹¹ or the world-tree). By killing Dagr with a grasping fork, he implicitly stole the last of the evening sun's light, thereby bringing day to an end.

Kolr the Gibbous, His Fork-Wielding Son and the Sword Angrvaðill

Details strongly suggestive of lunar and solar mythology appear in the Old Norse *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* 'Saga of Þorsteinn, son of Víkingr'. This has been called a 'fantastic and incoherent' work,²¹² which was probably written around 1300.²¹³ The following discussion may make parts of it appear less incoherent.

Chapter 3 of the saga introduces an evil character called *Kolr*, a name probably derived from ON *kol* 'coals' but also suggestive of *kollr* 'head':

Þann mann er at nefna til sögunnar, er Kolr hét. Mart gott er af honum at segja, þat fyrst, at hann var stórr sem jötunn, ljótr sem fjándinn, ok svá fjölkunnigr, at hann fór í jörðu ok á ok límdi saman stóð ok stjörnur. Hann var svá mikil hamhleypa, at hann brást í ýmissa kvikinda líki. Hann fór ýmist með vindum eða í sjó. Hann hafði svá mikinn hring á herðum, at ef hann stóð rétt, bar hæra kryppuna en höfuðit.²¹⁴

That man is to be named for (the purpose of) the saga who is called Kolr. Many a good thing is to be said about him.²¹⁵ First that he was big as a giant, ugly as the Devil, and so knowledgeable about sorcery that he travelled in earth and on it, and he glued together a stud/studs (of horses) and stars. He was such a great skin-changer that he quickly turned into various living forms. He went about variously with winds or in the sea. He had such a great ring on his shoulders that, if he stood upright, he carried the hunch higher than the head.

The chapter continues by recording, among other things, that Kolr, who had conquered India and become its king, was called *kroppinbakr*

211 On this concept, see Chapter 16.

212 M. Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (London, 1934), 37.

213 For a study of this saga in the context of one manuscript, see E. Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in Eggertsbók, a Late Medieval Icelandic Saga-Book', in A. Lassen, A. Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (ed.), *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development* (Reykjavík, 2012), 375–403.

214 *FSN*, III, 6–7; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 389–90.

215 An ironic statement.

'hunchback'.²¹⁶ He owned three treasures. The first was a sword called *Angrvaðill* (I venture a translation of this name below), which was *svá góðr gripr, at ekki var betra borit í þann tíma* 'such a good treasure that no better was carried at that time'. The second was a *gullhríngur* 'gold ring' called *Glæsir* 'Shining One'. The third was a drinking horn with the nasty property of inflicting leprosy and forgetfulness on those who drank from its lower half, and only curing those who drank from its upper half—thereby ensuring the cure was wasted on anyone who drank deeply!²¹⁷ Kolr, it appears, was both a niggard and a cruel spreader of disease and mental illness.

Later in the same chapter we learn that:

Kolr krossinbakr lét seiða til þess, at ekki vápn skyldi at bana verða öllu hans afsprengi utan sverðit Angrvaðill. Ekki járn bitr þau annat.

En þá Kolr var fullgamall, dó hann illum dauða.²¹⁸

Kolr the hunchback had *seiðr* [i.e., a form of feminine magic] worked to this end, that no weapon should be the death of all his offspring, except the sword Angrvaðill. No other iron bites them.

And when Kolr was very old, he died a bad death.

We learn no more about Kolr's death, so we cannot tell whether he also died by Angrvaðill. However, one detail which immediately catches the eye is Kolr's peculiar gluing (with lime) of stars to stud-horses, which, judging from the *s*-alliteration, might derive from a lost poem. Given Kolr's evil looks, knowledge of sorcery and possessive nature, it probably identifies him as a snatcher of stars, which he attached to horses. Whether the equines were heavenly or terrestrial is unknown. Perhaps Kolr stole stars simply by attaching them to horses, though the use of glue for this purpose, rather than a harness, would be odd. I therefore suggest that he rather stole stars and glued them to the *foreheads* of terrestrial horses, who then became especially prized.²¹⁹ We have already encountered a likely star-thief in this study:

²¹⁶ FSN, III, 7; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 390.

²¹⁷ FSN, III, 7; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 390.

²¹⁸ FSN, III, 8; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 391.

²¹⁹ Cf. CV s.v. *stjarna* 2. For 'star' denoting an auspicious mark on a horse's forehead, see OED s.v. 'star' n.1 I. 9b (quotation from 1390); Howey, *The Horse*, 222–4.

the Man in the Moon on the seal of Walter de Grendon.²²⁰ Although, to my knowledge, the Man is nowhere described gluing stars to horses, he and the other hunters of celestial light that we have encountered encourage the suspicion that Kolr the hunchback was once the gibbous moon. This suspicion strengthens in light of a Modern Icelandic word for a horse with a white blaze on its forehead: *glámur*, the same word as ON *glámr* ‘moon’;²²¹ if a horse could have a moon on its forehead, it is no great stretch of the imagination to envisage the same idea extended to a star. Furthermore, there is the curious detail of the ‘great ring’ on Kolr’s shoulders. We might rationalize this simply as a severe spinal curvature.²²² It would be so extreme, however, that I suggest it was originally not distinct from Kolr’s implicitly shining gold ring; it may be interpretable as a memory of the moon, or the stolen sun, shining where his head ought to be,²²³ or (like some other rings encountered in this study) of an annular solar eclipse.

There is also the name of Kolr’s outstanding sword, *Angrvaðill*, to consider. The first element of this compound is probably ON *angr* ‘grief, sorrow, trouble, affliction’. The second element, *-vaðill*, has previously been translated ‘wader’,²²⁴ but, especially given Kolr’s other potentially lunar attributes, I would relate it rather to OE *waðol*, which I earlier proposed is a forerunner of the obsolete English dialect noun ‘waddle’, a term for the moon’s wane. It would make excellent sense for offspring of a lunar character to die by a remarkable sword called ‘Grief-Wane’, which, since it was peerless and no doubt stolen, is likely to have been a weapon of heavenly light—we shall shortly find that it was, indeed, radiant.

Additionally, if Kolr were originally the moon, this could explain the actions and attributes of one of his sons, Hárekr *járnhauss* ‘Ironskull’, who is introduced in chapter 2. There we read of a Swedish king called *Hringr* ‘Ring’ whose daughter, *Húnvör* ‘Hun(?)-Goddess’, was the fairest and most accomplished of women, but so arrogant that she had

220 See Chapter 10 above.

221 *PTP*, 913.

222 As assumed in B. Waggoner (trans.), *The Sagas of Fridthjof the Bold* (New Haven, 2009), 6.

223 Recall *Quasi Caput Luna*; also the vessel of sunlight between the horns of the lunar thief in *Riddle 29*.

224 *PTP*, 796–7 (*-vaðill* would then relate to ON *vaða* ‘to wade’); cf. *ibid.*, 800–1 for the ‘sword’-term *hrævaðr*, explained as ‘one who wades through corpses’. Other possible translations of *Angrvaðill* are ‘Grief-Shallows’ and ‘Firth-Shallows’.

refused all offers of marriage. One day, there came over the impassable mountain behind Hringr's settlement *einn maðr, ef mann skyldi kalla* 'a man, if you could call him a man'; he was bigger and more hideous than anything people had seen before—*líkari jötni en mennskum manni* 'more like a giant [*jötunn*] than a human being', and he held in his hand a *flein tvíoddaðan* 'two-pointed pike'.²²⁵ He asked to enter the king's hall, but the guards refused him access, whereupon he stabbed them with his pike, so that either point skewered one of them. He heaved them over his head and threw their lifeless bodies to the ground a long way off. He then entered the hall and approached the king. He introduced himself and requested Húnvör in marriage—or else he would kill the king, seize his kingdom and take Húnvör as concubine. Húnvör refused his offer, but Hárekr agreed to stake everything on a duel against Hringr or one of his men. His opponent turned out to be a certain *Víkingr* 'Viking', whose father had given him *Angrvaðill* after taking it from another of Kolr's sons.²²⁶

Chapter 4 records that, on the day of the duel, Hárekr was unimpressed by his foe. He declared he could kill *Víkingr* just by punching him with his fist (*hnefi*),²²⁷ but he did not get the chance. *Víkingr* drew *Angrvaðill*, *ok var því líkt sem elding brygði af honum* 'and at that moment it was as if lightning sprang from it'; the sword cut Hárekr in two, its blade running on into the ground *allt at hjöltum* 'all the way to the hilt'.²²⁸ Later, in chapter 7, *Víkingr* marries Húnvör.

Behind the giant-man Hárekr, and his two-pronged pike,²²⁹ may lie the myth of the moon's forker of the sun, traces of which may survive in at least some of the saga's various 'rings'.²³⁰ It will also be observed that

225 *FSN*, III, 3; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 386. A variant reading is *flein tvíangaðan* 'two-forked pike'.

226 *Víkingr* had the pedigree to wield a radiant sword. His mother was *Eimyrja* 'Embers', sister of *Eisa* '(Glowing) Embers'. Their mother was *Glöð* 'Glad' (but probably better *Glóð* 'Red-Hot Embers'), wife of the giant *Hálogi* 'High Flame', who was originally simply *Logi* 'Flame'.

227 *FSN*, III, 9; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 393.

228 *FSN*, III, 10; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 393.

229 It is later called a *kesju forna* 'old *kesja* [some type of halberd]', which, it was thought, no man could wield because of its weight (*FSN*, III, 25; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 409), and *kesjufleiminn Háreksnaut* 'the *kesju*-pike Hárekr's Gift' (*FSN*, III, 35; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 419).

230 Note that Hárekr inherits the ring *Glæsir*. It is also of interest that his sister, a troll-woman called *Dís* 'Supernatural Lady', masquerades as *Sólbjört* 'Sun-Bright' to entrap *Víkingr* in chapter 5.

Hárekr recalls Grendel, as does Kolr in some respects. Hárekr may not be a man-eater, but he too was an evil man-giant magically immune to all but one marvellous and radiant sword. He too invaded a Scandinavian king's hall and killed his men. And he too used (or threatened to use) his hand as a mortal weapon.

Angrvaðill parallels the giant sword in multiple respects. Both are:

- (a) Peerless.
- (b) Radiant with heavenly light. Although the former's light may appear fulgural, rather than solar, it may be noted that one Old Norse term for 'lightning', *leiptr*, was also a term for the sun.²³¹
- (c) Unfailingly victorious: the giant sword is *sigeeadig* 'victory-eager' (*Beowulf* 1557); of Angrvaðill it was said that '*hefir jafnan fylgt því sigr*' "'victory has always accompanied it'".²³²
- (d) Dispatchers of a man-giant who wielded a large fork or similar weapon in a single blow.
- (e) Formerly the possession of an evil parent (in both cases probably lunar) of the fork-wielding man-giant whom they destroy (assuming the giant sword is guarded by Grendel's mother).
- (f) Deprived in some way (albeit very differently) of their blades when dispatching this monster, leaving only their hilt as the focus of attention. Whereas Angrvaðill's blade sank merely sank wholly into the ground, the giant sword's blade entirely melted.²³³
- (g) Bringers of a terminal wane in destroying the (probably lunar) man-giant. In addition, the giant sword itself wanes (though Angrvaðill does not).

Angrvaðill also features prominently later in the saga in a suggestive episode. By then, it had passed to Víkingr's son, Þorsteinn, the oldest, biggest and strongest of nine brothers. In chapter 19 we read that one

²³¹ *PTP*, 910.

²³² *FSN*, III, 25; *Rafn*, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 409.

²³³ Cf. the sword of Járnskjöldr mentioned earlier in this chapter.

day, Þorsteinn's ship was destroyed in a magical storm sent by his foes. Þorsteinn managed to swim almost to shore, but was being drawn under when, in the nick of time, he saw an old woman, *stórskorin mjök ok heldr grepplig í ásjónu* 'very large-boned and rather ugly in appearance', wearing a skin-cloak.²³⁴ She was wading towards him. She snatched him from the water, identified herself as *Skellnefja* 'Rattle(?) Nose', and offered him his life, if he would do one thing for her. After bringing him ashore, *sló hun þá á við hann glímu nokkuri, þar til honum gerði heitt* 'she then set to somewhat of a wrestling-match with him, until he became hot'.²³⁵ Subsequently, Þorsteinn was attacked by an arrogant man called *Jökull* 'Icicle/Ice/Glacier' and the exhausted Þorsteinn toppled off a riverbank. Jökull left him for dead.²³⁶ In the fall, *Angrvaðill hraut ór hendi honum ok ofan í móðuna* 'flew from his hand down into the large river (of muddy water)', but Þorsteinn landed on a grassy spot, where he lay *milli heims ok heljar* 'between the (living) world and Hel'.²³⁷ He expected only death, but again the hideous Skellnefja came to save him. This time she named her price: he must agree to marry her. He reluctantly agreed, on condition that she get his sword. She then carried him to a large cave (in chapter 17 said to be *við Djúpamóðu* 'by *Djúpamóða* "Deep (Muddy) River"'), where he was healed within a week. And one day, *um kveldit kom hún aftr með sverðit, ok var þá vott mjök* 'during the evening she came back [i.e., to the cave] with the sword, and it was then very wet'.²³⁸ She gave it to him and revealed that her real name was Ingibjorg. She was a princess who had been bewitched, but Þorsteinn's agreement to marry her had broken the spell, returning her to her beautiful, youthful self. She added the request that Þorsteinn spare the life of her brother, Beli, which he did after getting the better of him in battle; they become sworn-brothers.

In addition to showing similarities to texts already mentioned, this episode's account of Angrvaðill falling into water, from which it is later recovered, parallels a tradition about the sword Mistilteinn treated

234 FSN, III, 50; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 435; cf. *Skinnhúfa* 'Skin-Hood' in *Hjálmpes saga*.

235 FSN, III, 50–51; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 435.

236 In chapter 25 of the saga, the two meet again. Þorsteinn severs Jökull's arm with Angrvaðill, causing him to be known as *Jökull inn einhendi* 'the One-Handed' thereafter.

237 FSN, III, 52; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 437.

238 FSN, III, 53; Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, II, 438.

in Chapter 15 of this study. Potentially important, too, is the name of Þorsteinn's saviour, *Ingibjörg* 'Ingi-Help/Deliverance'.²³⁹ Although this is not an uncommon name, we may wonder whether it is a clue that Ing(i), rather than Þorsteinn, was the episode's original protagonist, and that it was formerly his radiant, moon-slaying sword which was lost to, and recovered from, water.²⁴⁰

Anger, Death and the Dismembered Moon

Further significant congruences exist between Grendel and his mother and traditions about the moon in world mythology. In this section I briefly treat each in turn.

As one scholar of lunar myths observes, Greek *men* 'moon' is 'also the root of the verb "to be angry", "to rage", *menaiō*', on which basis she raises the possibility that there was once a link between the moon and rage.²⁴¹ Grendel, who *Godes yrre bær* 'bore God's ire' (711), was explicitly *yrremod* 'angry in spirit' (726), *yrre* 'angry' (769, 2073),²⁴² and his reign of terror appears motivated primarily by jealous rage at the light and merriment of Heorot (*Beowulf* 86–9). Also, his dismemberment (see below) caused his mother's vengeful visit to the same hall.

Especially when waning or dark, the moon is often imagined as a bringer of death, a kidnapper, killer and devourer of men.²⁴³ Grendel

239 Earlier, *Ingibjörg* is also the name of a maid of Hringr's daughter Húnvör, of whom she seems almost a double. In the same saga a daughter of Beli is also called *Ingibjörg*. Additionally, chapter 25 records that Þorsteinn had a daughter called *Véfreyja* 'House/Temple/Standard/Priest/Woe Freyja', whom *Skellnefja/Ingibjörg* conceived and raised in the cave. She received *Angrvaðill* after her father.

240 Additionally, chapter 23 of the saga contains parallels to *Beowulf*'s encounter with Grendel's mother; Lethbridge, 'Place', 395–6. Þorsteinn wrestles in the sea with a whale-like, sword-resistant man called *Ötunfaxi* 'Unclean Mane', who drags him to the bottom. He is saved only by the intervention of a dwarf called *Sindri* 'Cindery', with whose knife Þorsteinn guts *Ötunfaxi* (Þorsteinn received this knife after giving *Sindri*'s daughter a gold ring; compare *Vilhjálmr*'s similar exchange in *Sigurðar saga þogla*, discussed in Chapter 12, and an exchange in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar bersekjabana*, *FSN*, III, 348). At the surface, Þorsteinn's companions see blood and entrails in the water and assume he is dead.

241 Cashford, *Moon*, 308.

242 The climactic dragon, the *niðdraca*, is also *yrre* 'angry' (2669). So, too, though, is *Beowulf*.

243 For examples from around the world, see Cashford, *Moon*, 309–12. In addition, the Norse *Máni* was apparently a kidnapper. *Gylfaginning* records (*SnEGylf*, 14): '*Máni stýrir tungls ok ræðr nýjum ok niðum. Hann tók tvau börn af jörðunni, er svá heita: Bil ok*

stole and ate men. His mother presumably also ate them. She made off with Æschere's body, leaving only his head behind.

The moon's waning is often imagined as a dismemberment or beheading, sometimes inflicted by a thunder-god but usually by a sun-god using a knife (or knives) or a sword.²⁴⁴ Beowulf, adopted champion of the friends of Ing and defender of their sun-like hall, initially dismembered Grendel by hand—and, as noted earlier, the poet's wordplay may implicitly link Grendel's *wani(ge)an* 'bemoaning' of his pain to the *wanian* 'waning' of the moon. Beowulf later beheaded both Grendel and his mother with a sun-like sword. In Grendel's case, therefore, his wane was progressive, as is the moon's.

The moon's apparent death by waning may result from a curse.²⁴⁵ Grendel and his mother were both cursed as descendants of Cain, a figure traditionally associated with the moon.

The dark moon is sometimes imagined to be resting or sleeping in the underworld.²⁴⁶ Beowulf found the one-armed Grendel *on ræste ...*

Hjúki, er þau gengu frá brunni þeim er Byrgir heitir, ok báru á ǫxlum sér sá er heitir Sægr, en stöngin Simul. Viðfinnr er nefndr faðir þeira. Þessi börn fylgja Mána, svá sem sjá má af jörðu. "'Máni steers the moon and controls its waxings and wanings. He took two children from the earth, who are called thus: Bil 'Failure/Empty Space' and Hjúki [cf. CV s.v. *hjúka* 'to nurse, cherish (a baby, a sick person)'], when they were walking from the well called *Byrgir* 'Hider', and they bear on their shoulders the tub called *Sægr* 'Sleet, Wet, Rain', and the pole *Simul* 'Ever'. Their father is called *Viðfinnr* 'Wood/Wide-Finn'. These children accompany Máni, just as one can see from Earth.'" For discussion, see Simek, *Dictionary*, 201–2; A. Holtsmark, 'Bil og Hjuka', *Maal og minne* (1945), 139–54; 'Hjúki and Bil', in *Wikipedia* (13 November 2018), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hj%C3%BAki_and_Bil

244 Cashford, *Moon*, 315–20; Krupp, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, 57–60; S. Milbrath, 'Decapitated Lunar Goddesses in Aztec Art, Myth, and Ritual', *Ancient Mesoamerica* 8 (1997), 185–206. Perhaps such a tradition relates to the myth of the Anglo-Saxon god Woden using nine *wuldortanas* 'brilliant twigs' (compare Óðinn with his single *gambanteinn?*), some of which may have thundered, to shatter (with forked lightning?) a snake into nine parts in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm* (the incantation section of which uses the verb (*wið*)*stunian* 'to make a loud noise (against)' of certain plants). R. H. Bremmer Jr., 'Hermes-Mercury and Woden-Odin as Inventors of Alphabets: A Neglected Parallel', in A. Bammesberger (ed.), *Old English Runes and their Continental Background* (Heidelberg, 1991), 409–19 at 415 rejects the traditional interpretation of these twigs as magical, viewing them rather as actual weapons, whether rods or swords (compare the twig-swords examined in the present study).

245 Cashford, *Moon*, 313–4. Cf. Chapter 16 on the moon's loss of light after Cain's murder of Abel.

246 Cashford, *Moon*, 334. Cf. *Der Mond* and *The Dead Moon* above; recall, too, *Skjaldvör's* being put to sleep, her yawning, and the drowsiness of *Járnskjöldr*.

guðwerigne ... licgan, aldorleasne 'lying in rest [or 'on a bed'], battle-weary, lifeless' (1585–7) at the bottom of the mere. Beowulf, I believe, had to behead Grendel in order to prevent him returning to life like the waxing moon.

Many peoples imagine the moon to be a land of the dead, the abode of the souls of the deceased, and the moon as a bearer of the dead.²⁴⁷ Grendel took dead men to his submarine lair, which is identified with Hell. Furthermore, Beowulf's descent therein and emergence therefrom echoes the Harrowing of Hell, when Christ redeemed from Hell the souls of the righteous who had died before him.

These correspondences further strengthen the case for a lunar aspect to Grendel and his mother, an aspect that complements the nature of the poem's third main monster, if the *niðdraca* is, or alludes to the concept of, a 'waning/dark-moon dragon'.

The Lunar Head and the Solar Head

The parallels between Grendel, the monster called *Quasi Caput Luna* in *Wonders*, Glámr in *Grettis saga* and the boatforker of *Hjálmþés saga* encourage the idea that Grendel had a lunar aspect focused on his head. If he did, this lends additional significance to Beowulf's decision to bring Grendel's head to Heorot, along with the giant sword (and Hrunting). On one level, Beowulf probably brings Grendel's head simply as proof that he has finally destroyed the vampiric monster; on another, he does so 'in requital for Æschere's head'.²⁴⁸ But there is probably still more to the head's arrival in Heorot.

Grendel's *hafelan heorodreorigne* 'sword-bloody head' (1780) and the giant sword's hilt, which Beowulf describes together as *sælac* 'sea-offerings/sacrifices/gifts/medicines/booty' (1624,²⁴⁹ 1652) and as serving *tires to tacne* 'as a sign of glory' (1654), have more than a destination in common. Both are:

247 See Cashford, *Moon*, 337–9. This widespread belief suggests that the concluding image of Niðhoggr ascending with corpses in its wings in *Völuspá* 66 may signify the resurrection of virtuous humans from the dead, so that they may live in the golden hall of Gimlé, which is *sólu fegra* 'fairer than the sun' (64).

248 Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*', 93–4.

249 This instance (emended and discussed in *KB*) may also pun on 'sea-battles'.

- (a) Severed heads. The hilt, which is all that remains of the giant sword when brought to Heorot, is effectively that weapon's head. Compare the Langeid sword, for instance.
- (b) Incomparably huge. Grendel's head was so enormous that it took four men to bring it to Heorot, possibly with two at either end of the *wælsteng* 'slaughter-pole' that transfixing it (1634–9);²⁵⁰ compare the uniquely large-boned head of the lunar giant with the boatfork in *Hjálmpés saga*. As the giant sword was the largest, heaviest sword, which only Beowulf (of humans) could wield, its 'head' must also have been immense.
- (c) 'Marked' objects on which men gazed in wonder.

With regard to the third point, in *Beowulf* we hear of the giant's head that:

Pa wæs be feaxe on flet boren
 Grendles heafod þær guman druncon—
 egeslic for eorlum ond þære idese mid,
 wliteseon wrætlíc; weras on sawon. (1647–50)

Then Grendel's head was carried by the hair onto the floor where men were drinking—terrible for noblemen and for the lady with them, a marked spectacle; men looked upon it.

This translation does not, I think, do full justice to the description's subtlety. Grendel's head was certainly 'terrible' (*egeslic*) to behold—and when alive had emitted an unpleasant fiery light from its eyes—but it was also 'awesome' (*ege* 'awe') and one *maðmæhta* 'of the treasures' (1613) that Beowulf took. It was undoubtedly a 'spectacle', but the unique compound *wliteseon* suggests more than that. It contains a simple pun on 'face-sight' (cf. *wlita* and *andwlite* 'face'), but, more intriguingly, other instances of *wlite* and related Old English words denote, or are associated with, beauty and impressive looks. For example, in *Beowulf* the earth is *wlitebeorhtne* 'beautifully bright' (93), the Danish coastguard is impressed by Beowulf's *wlite*, his *ænlic ansyn* 'unique form' (250–1), and the giant sword is *wlitig* 'beautiful' (1662). If Grendel's head had instead

²⁵⁰ Owen-Crocker, 'Horror in *Beowulf*', 88 n. 8.

been a **wlatseon* 'loathsome sight', the sense would be unremarkable, but as it stands we may wonder whether *wliteseon* hints at the marked (*wrætlic*)—that is, both outstanding and cratered or besmirched—*wlite* 'beauty' of the moon, the complement to its sinisterness.²⁵¹ As observed in King Alfred's *Metres of Boethius* (28):

Hwa is on weorulde þæt ne wundrige
fulles monan, þonne he færinga
wyrð under wolcnum wlates bereafad,
beþeaht mid þiostrum? (41–4)²⁵²

Who is there in the world who does not wonder at the full moon, when it suddenly becomes bereaved/robbed of beauty (*wlites*) under the clouds, covered over with darknesses?

That Grendel's head, along with the hilt, serves as *tires to tacne* encourages the same thought, as not only is *tir* associated with *torht* 'bright(ness)' in Old English literature,²⁵³ but, in the *Old English Rune Poem*, *Tir* is a heavenly body, a *tacna sum* 'notable sign' which passes over the clouds of night, one which *næfre swiceþ* 'never fails'.²⁵⁴

For its part, the giant sword's hilt, we have seen, was marked with runes and the subject of Hroðgar's gaze.

If Grendel's severed head intimates the defeated dark moon and the giant sword's separated hilt intimates the victorious sun-Cross, Beowulf brings to Heorot symbols of the two chief heavenly bodies, about which a poet had earlier sung in that very hall (94–5). Furthermore, Beowulf's offerings would closely parallel what we see in the Crucifixion/Doomsday scene on the Lindisfarne grave-marker: a blazing sun and a waned moon on either side of the hilt of a sword-like Cross which is beheld by men.²⁵⁵

251 The term may also express the 'inexpressible thrill of horror, a repulsion within an attraction'; Cohen, *Of Giants*, 64, 66–7.

252 Irvine and Godden, *Old English Boethius*, 340.

253 See quotations in *BT* s.v. *tir*, *tir-eadig*, *tir-fæst*.

254 Unlike Hrunting (see *ecg geswac* 'the edge/sword failed' 1524) and Nægling (*guðbill geswac* 'the battle-bill failed' 2584; *geswac æt sæcce* 'failed in battle' 2681). Since the rune-inscribed hilt of the giant sword would be 'T'-shaped, it might suggest the ᚏ-*rune*, the name of which, *Tir*, relates to the heathen Anglo-Saxon god *Tiw* and to the Old Norse *Týr* who lost a hand to Fenrir. Both gods seem to have been associated with swords, the ᚏ-*rune* being inscribed on the pommels of at least two Anglo-Saxon examples; see R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn. (Woodbridge, 1999), 91–2.

255 See Chapter 4.

15. The Sun in the Pike

By now, I hope that from the substantial body of evidence gathered in Part II for the existence of analogous Old English and Norse myths about conflict between sun and moon over the possession of light—from more general Old Norse references to lunar giants and giantesses, and from passages from *Beowulf* and preceding texts in the Nowell Codex (to categorize just some of the evidence adduced so far)—it will appear likely that Grendel and his mother are closely associated with the moon, especially in its waning or dark state. Equally, it may appear probable that these monsters' enemies, Hroðgar (by virtue of his relationship to Ing and lordship of Heorot) and Beowulf (as the effective champion of the 'friends of Ing'), are closely associated with the sun. The giants' association with the dark moon would give them strong reason to be angered by the brilliance of sunlight (manifest as, or within, bright human dwellings) and to want to steal, arrogate or devour it, like the moon-creature of *Riddle 29* and the giant, implicitly lunar wolves of Old Norse mythology. If I interpret the symbolism of *Beowulf* correctly, sunlight stolen or arrogated by lunar giants is symbolized in this poem by the golden-hilted giant sword which shone like the sun upon decapitating its wrongful possessors in the mere.

This chapter presents further evidence to bolster this interpretation. It adduces traditions, preserved in Old Norse and very much later-recorded Finnish texts, that heavenly fire or the sun or a probably radiant sword was swallowed by a large predatory fish—sometimes specifically a whitefish or pike—from which it was later extracted when that fish was cut open.¹ Such traditions, I go on to propose, may

1 *MIFL*, motif A713.1 'Sun and moon from belly of a fish'. On aspects of Finnish and traditional Finnish literature in relation to Germanic languages and Germanic myth, including traditions contained in *Beowulf*, see, in addition to the work of Frog, Robinson, 'Germanic *uargaz'; Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode';

illuminate aspects of Grendel's mother as *brimwylf* 'sea-she-wolf' and her *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' possession of the giant sword.² I start with the Finnish texts.

Three Golden Eggs, a Fallen Spark and a Pike

A Finnish folk-poem, *Luominen IV* 'The Creation IV', recorded in 1871, tells how an eagle once spotted a nesting-place—or so it thought—out at sea, where it laid three golden eggs.³ Thereupon the god Väinämöini (also known as Väinämöinen), feeling his knee burning, shook his knee, so that the eggs rolled into the water. Next *tulipa hauki hankotellen / vejen koira konkotellen* 'a pike came prowling, a water-dog lumbering' (103–4), which swallowed the eggs. The mother-eagle swooped down and, at the third attempt, succeeded in splitting open the pike's guts. She looked at her eggs and declared that the white had become the sun, the yolk the moon and stars, the upper half (shell) the copper heavens, and the lower half the iron mother earth.⁴

Another Finnish folk-poem, known as *Tuli* 'Fire', of which there are many variants, records that the gods Ilmarinen (< *ilma* 'air', 'sky') and Väinämöinen struck a spark, which fell from the heavens down to earth and into a house, where it injured maidens and burnt a mother.⁵ The mother cast the spark into the sea, into the gloomy (mythical) Lake Alue. Three times on one summer's night the lake's waters raged as high as

Tolley, *Shamanism*; J. Lindow, 'Comparing Balto-Finnic and Nordic Mythologies', in P. Hermann, S. A. Mitchell, J. P. Schjødt (ed.), *Old Norse Mythology—Comparative Perspectives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2017), 223–39. Beowulf came ashore on *Finna land* 'in the land of Finns/Lapps' (580) after slaying sea-monsters in the Breca-episode. For Finno-Baltic myths about the theft or obscuration and eventual return of the sun, see Dubois, 'Mythic Sun', 202–5. The basic idea has parallels around the world; see *MIFL*, motif A721.1 'Theft of sun'.

- 2 See also my thoughts below on the hall *Lýr* 'Pollack/Whitefish/Pike/Fish' in *Svipdagsmál*.
- 3 M. Kuusi, K. Bosley and M. Branch (ed. and trans.), *Finnish Folk Poetry. Epic: An Anthology in Finnish and English* (Helsinki, 1977), 89–92, with notes on 522–3. All quotations and translations from Finnish in this chapter are taken from this edition.
- 4 A variant of this poem, *Luominen I* (dated 1883) has a *päivöilintu* 'sun-bird', but no fish; Kuusi, Bosley and Branch, *Finnish Folk Poetry*, 83–4. In a third version, *Luominen III* (from 1893), the bird is a scaup duck which lays a single golden egg, the fish is again missing, and the white becomes the moon and the yolk the sun; *ibid.*, 87–8.
- 5 Kuusi, Bosley and Branch, *Finnish Folk Poetry*, 99–101, with notes on 524–5 which observe close parallels with an Indian myth about how the sun was stolen and then released from a fish's stomach.

spruce trees, due to the ferocity of the spark's flames. Next the spark was swallowed by a whitefish, which was swallowed by a grey pike, which was swallowed by a light lake-trout, which was swallowed by a red salmon. This salmon was netted by Väinämöinen, who, having donned iron mittens, split open each fish in turn, presumably using a knife or sword (though this poem mentions neither), until the spark came out. Finally, the spark was lulled in a silver sling on a misty headland.

Tyrfingr and the Pike

Chapter 10 of the Old Norse *Heiðreks saga* records that nine slaves of noble birth killed King Heiðrekr—a worshipper of Freyr, according to one version of his saga⁶—while he was in bed and made off with the sword Tyrfingr. The king's son, Angantýr, vowed to avenge his father. One evening, Angantýr came to the sea beside the river Grafá. There he saw three men in a fishing-boat, one of whom caught a fish. That man requested that:

... annarr skyldi fá honum agnsaxit at hofða fiskinn; en sá kvezk eigi laust mega láta.

Hinn mælti, 'Taktu sverðit undan hofðajölinni ok fá mér,' en sá tók ok brá ok sneið hofuð af fiskinum, ok þá kvað hann vísu:

'Þess galt hon gedda
fyrir Grafár ósi,
er Heiðrekr var veginn
undir Harvaða fjöllum.'⁷

... another should get him the bait-knife to behead the fish; but that man said he could not spare it.

The (first) man said, 'Take the sword from under the headboard and give it to me,' and he took it and drew it and cut the head off the fish, and then recited a verse:

'The pike has paid for it, before the mouth of the Grafá, when Heiðrekr had been slain beneath Harvaða fells [i.e., the Carpathians].'

6 Tolkien, *Saga*, 31.

7 Tolkien, *Saga*, 45.

That night, Angantýr slew the fishermen, now identified as three of the murderous slaves, and recovered Tyrfingr, which he had recognized as the sword used to behead the pike.

We noted earlier that previous episodes in the saga state that sun-like light shone from Tyrfingr whenever it was drawn. In the present episode, therefore, we may infer such radiance when Tyrfingr is removed from its place of hidden captivity and unsheathed. That its implicit shining immediately attends the beheading of a pike raises the possibility that this episode is a variant of the basic myth, preserved in the Finnish poems, that the sun was cut from such a fish, here perhaps with a solar sword.⁸ It appears noteworthy too that the watery settings in *Tuli* and *Heiðreks saga* are both deep-set: Lake *Alue* may well be 'Low-Lying' (< *alava* 'low-lying'), and *Grafá* means 'Sunken River'.⁹

Mistilteinn and the Pike

A pike also features in what seems a highly relevant episode of *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* 'The Saga of Hrómundr Gripsson'.¹⁰ This saga dates from the seventeenth century in its present form, but is based on late medieval poetry.¹¹ This poetry in turn probably derives from a lost saga reportedly recited in Reykjahólar, Iceland, in 1119.¹² Before coming to the pike-episode, however, I introduce Hrómundr and discuss an earlier episode in his saga as an analogue of *Beowulf's* mere-episode.

8 There was possibly also a Norse myth that another object of heavenly fire, Þórr's lightning-hammer, came from a fish. A runic inscription of disputed interpretation on an eleventh-century copper amulet from Öland, Sweden might record that Þórr's hammer *uR hafí kam* 'came from the sea'. Below the inscription is an illustration of a fish. See B. E. Nilsson, 'The Runic "Fish-Amulet" from Öland: A Solution', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 9 (1976), 236–45, and MacLeod and Mees, *Runic Amulets*, 27–9, though their interpretations relate this detail to the return of Þórr's hammer from the sea after striking the Miðgarðsormr.

9 Recall also that the radiant, moon-killing sword Angrvaðill was apparently recovered from *Djúpamóða* 'Deep (Muddy) River' (see Chapter 14). In *Beowulf*, a *fyrgenstream* 'mountain-stream/river' passes *under foldan* 'under the ground' near the mere in which the giant sword resides (1359–61).

10 FSN, II, 405–22.

11 For which, see Finnur Jónsson, *Fernir fornislenskir rímnaflokkrar*, 17–42.

12 Pulsiano and Wolf, *Medieval Scandinavia*, 305.

Hrómundr Gripsson, Þráinn and Mistilteinn

Hrómundr Gripsson ‘Praise-Hand, son of Grip’—compare the fame of *Beowulf*’s mighty *mundgripe* ‘hand-grip’ (*Beowulf* 380, 753, 965, 1534)—was an *augnafagr*, *hárbjartr* ‘fair-eyed, bright-haired’ man, fearless, and *mikill ok sterkr* ‘big and strong’.¹³ In chapters 3 and 4 of his saga we read that, following the directions of an old Hebridean man called *Máni* ‘Moon’,¹⁴ who told of a burial-mound containing a sword and other treasures, *Hrómundr* and his companions sailed south to Normandy, to the *haugr* ‘burial-mound’ of a sorcerer-berserker called *Þráinn* ‘Longing One’ (*þrá* ‘to long’, ‘longing’) or ‘Stubborn One’ (*þrár* ‘stubborn’). *Þráinn*—who shares his name with a dwarf mentioned in *Völuspá* 12—was formerly a king of that land, and had gained all his treasure *með göldrum* ‘with/via incantations’; this detail surely indicates that he had stolen them.¹⁵ He was now an evil undead creature with talons for nails (compare *Grendel*).

Only *Hrómundr* dared climb down into the mound. Inside he saw a sword hanging on a pillar, which he took. He then challenged *Þráinn*, whom he called a *hundr leiðr* ‘loathsome dog’, to reclaim his sword. *Þráinn* left his cauldron and roaring fire (compare the firelight in *Grendel*’s lair) to wrestle with the intruder, the day having passed. *Hrómundr* discarded the sword (as *Beowulf* did *Hrunting* when fighting *Grendel*’s mother) and *treysti afli sinu* ‘trusted in his strength’ (as *Beowulf* *strengre getruwode* ‘trusted in his strength’, 1533). Their tussle was long and hard, and the monster’s claws tore at *Hrómundr*’s flesh (compare the grasping of *Grendel*’s mother). *Þráinn* *tók ... at tryllast* ‘turned himself into a troll’ (compare *Grendel* and his mother as both humans and trollish giants), but at last, and after repeatedly accusing his opponent of being *ragr* ‘effeminate/sexually transgressive’, *Hrómundr* overthrew *Þráinn*, by which time *var orðit mjök dimmt* ‘it had become very dim’.¹⁶

Next *Þráinn* prophesied his own end: *aldri hefi ek ætlat, at þú, Mistilteinn, mitt góða sverð, mundir verða mér til meins* ‘Never have I

13 FSN, II, 407. *Hrómundr* is an assimilated form of *Hróðmundr*, the Old Norse equivalent of OE *Hroðmund*, *Hroðgar*’s son in *Beowulf*.

14 Cf. Finnur Jónsson, *Fernir forníslenskir rímnaflakkar*, 24.

15 FSN, II, 411. Cf. the actions of the giants *Mána* and *Skrimnir/Skrímnir*, noted in Chapter 14.

16 FSN, II, 412.

thought that you, Mistilteinn, my good sword, would do me harm'.¹⁷ Hrómundr then retrieved the sword and decapitated him. Before doing so he learnt that Þráinn had killed one hundred and forty-four men with the same weapon, including King Semingr of Sweden. Hrómundr then left, taking with him Mistilteinn, a ring and a necklace.¹⁸

Returning to the start of this series of events, we find that it was a male personification of the moon who directed Hrómundr to the sword Mistilteinn. How Máni came by this knowledge the saga does not say, but we may suspect that the text preserves a distorted memory of a myth in which the (Man in the) Moon, or an associate of his (Þráinn?), had stolen and hidden sunlight, symbolized, as in *Beowulf*, by a sword.

In this story, Mistilteinn seems to correspond to *both* Hrunting and the giant sword—an important point to which I return in Chapter 16. Mistilteinn belongs to the trollish, dog-like, quite possibly lunar Þráinn,¹⁹ who, given also his purported effeminacy or sexual transgressiveness, may correspond to both Grendel and Grendel's mother—two giants with a lupine aspect—or simply to Grendel's unnervingly masculine dam.²⁰ But although Þráinn has used Mistilteinn in the past, he does not use it in this episode, rather as Grendel and his mother never wield the giant sword against Beowulf. Also, although Mistilteinn is not said to shine in this story, given the reference to darkness immediately *before* Hrómundr takes it, we may suspect that it once did, like the giant sword in *Beowulf*. Another distinctive similarity between these weapons is that Mistilteinn was reputedly too heavy to wield;²¹ later in the saga, an enemy tells Hrómundr that *Mistilteinn er svá þungt vápn, at þú fær eigi valdit* 'Mistilteinn is such a heavy weapon that you cannot wield it',²² though Hrómundr proves otherwise by using it to cut his fiendish opponent's head in two, damaging the blade in the process. Similarly, in

17 FSN, II, 413.

18 Cf. the combination of mistletoe-connected sword and ring in the stories of Skírnir and Hotherus. Note also that two of Kolr's three treasures were the sword Angrvaðill and a golden ring.

19 Note that Þráinn arose to fight Hrómundr when the day had passed; that by the time of his overthrow the light had grown very dim, a detail perhaps suggestive of the lunar wane; and that the race of dwarves, one of whom is his namesake, was associated with the moon.

20 Cf. also the man-like troll-woman Mána.

21 *MIFL*, motif F833.1.1 'Sword so heavy that only its owner can lift it'.

22 FSN, II, 416.

Beowulf, the giant sword was too heavy for anyone other than Beowulf to use, and its blade was destroyed after beheading fiends.

Should a connection between the *Práinn*-episode and *Beowulf* be questioned because the saga's grave-mound differs from the Old English poem's submerged hall, other parallels between these texts may be noted.

Later, in chapter 7 of the saga, during a battle in Sweden on *Vænisís* 'Lake Vener's ice', a sorcerer called *Váli*, who had apparently created the ice, *blés sverðit ór hendi honum* 'blew the sword [Mistilteinn] from his [Hrómundr's] hand'. Mistilteinn fell through a hole in the ice (created for this purpose by *Váli*?) and *sökk niðr til grunns* 'sank down to the bottom'.²³ Hrómundr then threw *Váli* on to the ice *svá at hálsbeinit brotnaði* 'so that the neckbone broke', and lamented his sword's loss: *mitt góða sverð, Mistilteinn, fell í vatnit, ok þess fæ ek aldri bætr, at ek missti sverðit* 'my good sword, Mistilteinn, fell in the water, and I shall never get compensation for the fact that I lost the sword'.²⁴ Similarly, in *Dorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, *Angrvaðill* fell into water during the hero's fight with *Jökull* 'Icicle/Ice/Glacier'. These parallels raise the possibility that the giant sword reached the bottom of Grendel's mere after a similarly violent dispossession, though I still favour a premeditated theft by Grendel using his bag. Also noteworthy is the parallel between Hrómundr's dropping of Mistilteinn into the lake and the falling of the divine spark from the heavens into a lake in the Finnish poem *Tuli*.

Now we come to the pike-episode. According to chapter 8 of the saga, Mistilteinn was recovered from the stomach of *eina geddu* 'a pike' by a man called *Hagall* 'Hail' when he was out fishing.²⁵ It therefore seems likely that, by then, the ice on Lake Vener had at least partly thawed following *Váli*'s death.²⁶ If correct, this inference may call to mind the ice-melting metaphor in *Beowulf*, which immediately precedes the hero's emergence from the mere with the giant sword's hilt (1605–11).

We should note that also comparable to *Beowulf* is the emphasis on the hilt when *Hagall* returns Mistilteinn to Hrómundr: *Hrómundr varð*

23 FSN, II, 418.

24 FSN, II, 418.

25 FSN, II, 418. ON *gedda* 'pike-fish' relates to *gaddr* 'spike'. It appears in northern English dialect as 'ged'.

26 Note, however, that the name *Hagall* 'Hail' introduces a new form of ice.

glāðr við ok kyssti á hjölt sverðsins ok umbunaði vel karli ‘Hrómundr was glad at that and kissed the hilt on the sword and rewarded the old man well’.²⁷ Here the roles of old man and hero are reversed, however: in *Beowulf* it is the old king Hroðgar who, having been shown the sword-hilt, rewards Beowulf.

Grendel’s Mother as Pike

A sun-swallowing pike may well also lurk in the depths of Grendel’s mere. *Beowulf* twice describes Grendel’s mother as a *brimwylf* ‘sea-she-wolf’ during the hero’s adventure in the mere. The first time is when she bundles him into her lair:

Bær þa seo brimwylf,²⁸ þa heo to botme com,
hringa þengel, to hofe sinum. (1506–7)

Then the sea-she-wolf bore, when she came to the bottom, the prince of rings to her house.

Secondly, after Beowulf had beheaded Grendel, the men watching the waters in hope of Beowulf’s return saw blood in the water, from which many of them concluded *þæt hine seo brimwylf abroten hæfde* ‘that the sea-she-wolf had killed him’ (1599).

OE *brimwylf* is not found outside *Beowulf*. *OED* does, however, record ‘sea-wolf’ in Middle English.²⁹ It is first attested in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century as *se wolf* in the sense ‘a fabulous amphibious beast of prey’ (compare Grendel’s mother), and recurs in the late fourteenth century as *Seewolf* in the sense ‘a voracious sea-fish’. Similarly, the word ‘wolf’ has denoted voracious fish, including pike, since at least the mid-sixteenth century, on the model of Greek *λύκος* and Latin *lupus*: the *OED*’s first quotation, from 1555, reads ‘Woolues of the sea which sum thynke to bee those fysshes that wee caule pikes.’³⁰

27 *FSN*, II, 418.

28 An emendation of the manuscript reading *brimwyl*.

29 See also *MED* s.v. *se* (n.(1)), 1b.

30 *OED* s.v. ‘wolf’ n. 3b. There were also ancient and medieval traditions about a ferocious fish called the *lupus marinus* ‘sea wolf’, for which see C. Jacquemard *et al.* (ed.), ‘Chapter 54: Lupus Marinus’, in *Hortus Sanitatis: Livre IV, Les Poissons*, https://www.unicaen.fr/puc/sources/depiscibus/consult/hortus_fr/FR.hs.4.54; J. L. Rosier,

It will be recalled that the pike which swallows the golden eggs in *Luominen IV* is a 'water-dog'.

We therefore have grounds for suspecting that the *Beowulf*-poet's characterization of Grendel's mother may include a predatory piscine aspect (recall too that the Faroese Grýla sometimes has a fish-stomach).³¹ She may even be characterized as specifically a pike,³² as this species does inhabit fen water. If she is imagined as a voracious fish, she may share this aspect of her nature with her son, who lived with her at the mere's bottom (*grund*).³³ For the name *Grendel* (outside the poem also *Grindel* and *Gryndel*) may relate to 'Modern English *grindle*, *grundel*, German *grundel*, a fish haunting the bottom of the water.'³⁴ And since

'The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in *Beowulf*', *PMLA* 78 (1963), 8–14 at 13 n. 19. The *lupus marinus* is illustrated immediately above a pike in *A Society of Gentlemen, A New and Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2nd edn., 3 vols (London, 1763–4), III, pl. 163 fig. 3.

- 31 Note also a passage describing Hell's inhabitants in an Irish version of the *Visio Sancti Pauli*: 'There is an odious brown river, in which there are a thousand demonic beasts, like fish from the depths of the sea, which mercilessly swallow the souls of sinners like a wolf devours sheep'; Herbert and McNamara, *Irish Biblical Apocrypha*, 132. Additionally, a Middle English poem describes a fiery dragon as a *schrympe* 'crustacean' and likens the fiery-eyed, thieving, child-eating giant of Mont St. Michel to, among other creatures, a *hunde-fisch* 'hound-fish' (i.e., dogfish, shark) and a *fluke* 'flounder'; see V. Krishna (ed.), *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Critical Edition* (New York, 1976), 61 (line 767), 70 (lines 1084, 1088); J. Finlayson, 'Arthur and the Giant of St. Michael's Mount', *MÆ* 33 (1964), 112–20.
- 32 For a gold-rich dwarf, *Andvari* 'Watcher', who for a long time dwelt beneath a waterfall *i geddu liki* 'in the form of a pike', before being caught by Loki, see the prose introduction to the Eddic poem *Reginmál* 'Reginn's Speech'; also *PTP*, 852–3.
- 33 Her home arguably also makes her a *fenfisc* 'fen-fish', a word attested in an Old English medical text in association with *sæfixas* 'sea-fishes' that have *heard flæsc* 'hard flesh'; see *DOE* s.v. *fen-fisc*. The horrific nature of her home presumably distinguishes her from the *iar*(?), this being the name of a star-like Anglo-Saxon rune, ✻, which the *Old English Rune Poem* identifies as being *eafixa* 'of the river-fishes' and describes partaking of food on land and living joyfully in a beautiful home surrounded by water. A. K. Hostetter, 'The Rune Poem' (<https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/the-rune-poem>) translates its name as 'gar', which would make it a pike or similar fish—a surprising identification in view of the *iar*'s amphibious nature! More likely, the *iar* is a beaver, as proposed by M. Osborn and S. Longland, 'A Celtic Intruder in the Old English *Rune Poem*', *NM* 81 (1980), 385–7.
- 34 Chambers, *Beowulf*, 309; the corresponding entry in *OED*—*grindle*³ 'a name of the mud-fish'—is labelled 'U.S.' and receives a single citation from the late nineteenth century. Cf. E. G. Stanley, "'A Very Land-fish, Languagelesse, a Monster": Grendel and the Like in Old English', in Olsen and Houwen, *Monsters and the Monstrous*, 79–92. Also note Skjaldvör's son Haki 'Hake(?)' in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*. Many potential connotations of the name *Grendel* are discussed in Anderson, *Understanding Beowulf*, 96–8.

she is peculiarly described as *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' (1498), she may, given the Norse and Finnish stories adduced above, have been imagined in terms of a fish with an appetite for swords.

That an interpretation of Grendel's mother in terms of a pike or another voracious fish or fish-like creature is tenable is shown by Beowulf's earlier fight with sea-creatures, including whales (*hronfixas* 'hron-fishes' 540), during his swimming-match with Breca. There we heard that the *merefixa mod* 'wrath of mere-fishes' (549) was aroused, and that a *fah feondscaða* 'hostile fiend-ravager' (554), a *mihtig meredeor* 'mighty mere-beast' (558), grasped Beowulf and dragged him to the sea-bed, where he slew it *hildebille* 'with a battle-bill' (557).³⁵ This episode foreshadows Grendel's mother's dragging of Beowulf away from a host of attacking sea-creatures in the waters of the mere and down into her lair, where he first struck her *hildebille* (1520), namely Hrunting, and then apparently released sunlight by beheading her with another *hildebil* (1666), the giant sword. Without a more specific description of the beast that dragged Beowulf to the sea-bed in the earlier episode, the listener is highly likely to attribute it an at least partly piscine nature.

Of course, whereas the pike of *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* literally swallowed Mistilteinn, Grendel's mother had not actually ingested a sword, at least according to the surface narrative: Beowulf brought Hrunting with him to the mere, and he saw the giant sword hanging on the wall of the monsters' cave *before* beheading her. But the poet, I suggest, alludes to the myth of the sword-swallowing fish by describing Grendel's mother as *heorogifre* only shortly earlier,³⁶ and by recording

35 Recall how the troll-women Forað took whale-form just before dying in *Ketils saga hængs* (see Chapter 13 n. 56). Note also Old Norse poetic descriptions of giants as 'whales', and the giant-names *Hvalr* 'Whale' and *Vagnhofði* 'Killer-Whale's Head' (*Uagnhoftus/Uagnophtus* in *GD*) whose bearers were presumably at least partly cetaceous; see *PTP*, 709–10, 719–21. Significantly, too, the Old English poem *The Whale* describes its subject as a devilish *fisca cynn* 'species of fish' (1) that, rather like Grendel's mother, draws men down to the *grund* 'bottom (of the sea)' (29), to a *deaðsele* 'death-hall' (30) in the *mistglome* 'misty darkness' (47) of Hell; see A. Squires (ed.), *The Old English Physiologus* (Durham, 1988).

36 *KB*, 395 deprecates this sense in favour of 'fiercely ravenous', the only meaning given in *DOE*. Later English tradition tells of another monstrous, mere-dwelling fish which jealously guards (but does not consume) an Anglo-Saxon sword. *The Monster Fish of Bomere Pool*, a Shropshire folk-tale, tells of a fish 'bigger than any fish that ever swam', who wears by his side a 'wonderful sword', which he twice drew to cut himself free from fishermen's nets, which on the second occasion were made of iron. The sword formerly belonged to Wild Edric (originally Eadric *silvaticus*,

that a sun-like light shone *immediately after* her decapitation. Earlier I attributed this light principally to the giant sword, but, given the poet's characteristically ambiguous symbolism, this attribution is compatible with the secondary inference that the giant sword's killing blow released sword-like sunbeams from her pike-body.³⁷ We may recall the swallowing of the radiant sword Snarvendill by Vargeisa and implicitly Ýma in *Hjálmþés saga*, the gaping mouth of the gulf into which Grettir entered as 'sword-endower' in *Grettis saga*, and the various sun-swallowing creatures mentioned in earlier chapters.³⁸

Grendel's mother's appetite for swords may contribute to the poet's subtle evocation of Eastertide and its fusion with heathen myth. We noted earlier that the Paschal Candle—which may be one of the things symbolized by the giant sword—was lit by a candle *in the mouth* of a serpent. If the giant sword, a likely candle-sword, is 'lit' by the decapitation of Grendel's mother, this could be because in the underlying myth her body contained the burning candle of the sun, which was exposed and released from her throat when she was beheaded.

If my additional association of the giant sword with the Cross is justified, it should also be noted that medieval tradition often imagined Christ on the Cross as God the Father's baited fishing hook, which was swallowed by the Devil, imagined as a monstrous sea-creature.³⁹ In the

an Anglo-Saxon leader of resistance to the Normans), but was 'committed to the fish's keeping' when Edric vanished. The fish will yield the sword only when the rightful heir of Condover Hall comes to claim it. See C. S. Burne and G. F. Jackson, *Shropshire Folk-Lore: A Sheaf of Gleanings* (London, 1883), 79–82 (including a related tale); Briggs, *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales*, Part B, II, 272–3. Since *silvaticus* is Latin for 'of the wood', was Edric's weapon a twig-sword?

37 If chapter 10 of *Heiðreks saga* preserves a variant memory of such a sun-freeing myth, it strengthens the perception that it was a solar sword which freed the captive sunlight. Also noteworthy in the same episode is the mention of the bait-knife with which the pike is *not* beheaded, followed by the use of the solar sword Tyrfingr with which it *is*. We may perhaps compare the failure of Hrunting—the smaller, less remarkable sword—to behead Grendel's mother, followed by the giant sword's success with its stroke.

38 In addition, note *OED* s.v. 'sheat-fish', earlier 'sheath-fish' (earliest citation 1589), a term for the monstrous wels catfish, the Old Norse term for which was quite possibly *fengrani* 'moustached one of the fen'; *PTP*, 855. Was a sheath-fish once imagined to have swallowed a giant sword, and thereby to serve as its scabbard? Note, too, that a sword is itself often a 'fish' in Old Norse skaldic diction; Meissner, *Kenningar*, 154.

39 See Marchand, 'Leviathan', 330–3.

Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn I*, this idea may have inspired the animated *Tir-rune's* (†) piercing of the Devil in his tongue and cheeks;⁴⁰ and this rune, we noted earlier, was sometimes inscribed on swords.⁴¹ Later, an illustration in Herrad of Landsberg's twelfth-century *Hortus Deliciarum* 'Garden of Delights' depicts the crucified Christ as bait entering the gaping mouth of Leviathan, a monster with a wolf-like head, a coiled, limbed and winged serpentine body, and a fish's fins and tail.

As a 'sea-she-wolf' who, it is intimated, has swallowed sunlight, Grendel's mother may find an altogether larger parallel in the wolf-headed snake of the Gosforth Cross. As we have seen, this monster probably combines Fenrir (or Sköll and Hati) with the amphibious Miðgarðsormr—the latter also being a *jǫtunn* 'giant', rather as Grendel's wolfish mother is presumably, like her son, an *eoten*.⁴² This link, in turn, points to potential kinship with many other monsters of world mythology. Full examination of these creatures and their deaths is beyond the scope of this study, but similarities to Grendel's mother and her struggle with Beowulf are obvious. In my view, they underline the ancient foundations of aspects of *Beowulf* in nature-mythology. Five examples must suffice here:⁴³

- (a) The Babylonian dragon-lady Tiamat, a personification of the salty sea who is also sometimes depicted with a solar or lunar head. She is killed by *Marduk* 'Son of the Sun/Storm', who strikes her on the head with one weapon (compare Hrunting) and then, after seizing her hair, guts her like a fish with another (compare the giant sword).⁴⁴
- (b) Dānu, mother of the monstrous Indian snake *Vrtra* 'Obstacle', which was slain by Indra with a resounding or sun-like mace.⁴⁵
- (c) The Greek gorgon *Medusa* 'Guardian', from whose neck sprang (in addition to the lightning-bearing Pegasus) the hero

40 Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, 68–9 (l. 94); Marchand, 'Leviathan', 331, 336 n. 14.

41 See Chapter 14 n. 254.

42 See Chapter 10.

43 On these myths, and many related ones, see especially Fontenrose, *Python*.

44 G. A. Barton, 'Tiamat', *JAOS* 15 (1893), 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463225278-001>; T. Jacobsen, 'The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat', *JAOS* 88 (1968), 104–8; R. Grafman, 'Bringing Tiamat to Earth', *Israel Exploration Journal* 22 (1972), 47–9; M. F. Kaplan, 'Another Slaying of Tiamat?', *Israel Exploration Journal* 26 (1976), 174–7.

45 See Chapter 3.

Chrysaor ‘Golden Sword’, son of the sea-god Poseidon, after Perseus (son of Zeus) beheaded her with a sword.⁴⁶

(d) The Biblical Leviathan.⁴⁷

(e) The Biblical dragon burst by Daniel.⁴⁸

To return briefly to *Svipdagsmál*, an underlying, obscured myth about a fish being cut open by a solar sword to release the sun could also explain the implicit release by Svipdagr, son of *Sólbjartr* ‘Sun-Bright’, of the sun-bright Menglōð from the dwarf-made confinement of *Lýr* ‘Pollack/Whitefish/Pike/Fish’—the strangely named stronghold which trembled on a weapon-point (like a fish about to be gutted?). This possibility, in turn, raises the question of whether Grendel’s mother’s home—her hall and the turbulent mere above it—might itself be implicitly identified with a violent fish, one that contained a solar sword.

The mere’s actions certainly complement those of Grendel’s mother, perhaps even to the extent of acting as if under her control or as an extension of her being.⁴⁹ Thus, rather as she *gefeng* ‘seized’ (1501) Beowulf with her ‘terrible clutches’ and tried to pierce his mailcoat with her fingers, so the mere *onfeng* ‘received/took hold of’ Beowulf; and, inside her hall, Beowulf found that *nænig wæter wihte ne sceþede* ‘no water harmed him at all’ (1514) and *hrinan ne mehte / færgripe flodes* ‘the sudden grip of the flood could not touch him’ (1515–6). The mere’s waters may not have harmed Beowulf inside the hall, but it appears they had wanted to hurt him just as Grendel’s mother did. We may recall, too, the implicitly fish-like way in which, in *Grettis saga*, ‘the vaulted flight of stones *gaped with spray-cold mouth* at the

46 According to Hesiod’s *Theogony*, *Chrysaor* was so-called because he held a golden sword; H. G. Evelyn-White (trans.), *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, new and rev. edn. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936), 100–1. Elsewhere his name is an epithet of a divinity, usually Apollo; J. S. Clay, ‘The Generation of Monsters in Hesiod’, *Classical Philology* 88 (1993), 105–16 at 109, <https://doi.org/10.1086/367346>; D. Arnould, ‘Les noms des dieux dans la *Théogonie* d’Hésiode: étymologies et jeux de mots’, *Revue des Études Grecques* 122 (2009), 1–14 at 10, <https://doi.org/10.3406/reg.2009.7940>

47 Gershenson, *Apollo*, 90–3; M. K. Wakeman, *God’s Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden, 1973); Day, *God’s Conflict with the Dragon*.

48 F. Zimmermann, ‘Bel and the Dragon’, *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958), 438–40.

49 Recall my earlier comparison (Chapter 1 n. 18) of Grendel’s mother to *seo hell*, the female personification of Hell in the Old English *Gospel of Nicodemus*; see L. Bell, ‘“Hel our Queen”’.

sword-endower ... the flight-stream struck hard from the front against my breast.⁵⁰

If there is indeed a degree of identity between Grendel's mother and her hellish mere, this may confer a monstrously piscine nature on the latter, one that accords with Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the mouth of Hell. For medieval English tradition often imagined Hell as a beast with a gaping mouth,⁵¹ sometimes specifically a monstrous sea-creature—essentially the Leviathan mentioned above.

50 See Chapter 8 above.

51 See Cross and Hill, *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, 134; P. Hofmann, 'Infernal Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Charters' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2008), 85.

16. Conclusion

Beowulf, an Anglo-Saxon Song of Ice and Fire

Having covered so much ground and drawn so many parallels between aspects of *Beowulf*'s mere-episode and other texts, in this final chapter I summarize the study's main findings so far and tie up some loose ends. I also introduce important new evidence, make additional proposals and draw general conclusions about the significance of this study for the poem's interpretation.

My starting point was the image of how the blade of an outstanding golden-hilted sword (called 'the giant sword' throughout this study), which the eponymous hero discovered in the depths of a Danish mere, began *hildegicelum ... wanian* 'with battle-icicles ... to wane' (1606–7), of how it *eal gemealt ise gelicost* 'entirely melted most like ice' (1608) in the heat of monstrous blood after beheading the two giants who lived there: Grendel's mother and Grendel himself. This striking image appears at the centre of the poem and, in my view, has not been interpreted satisfactorily by previous scholars.

Evidence within *Beowulf*, together with external parallels in Old English, Old Norse and medieval Irish literature, suggests that this image may intimate more than one widely attested sword-metaphor. One such metaphor, common in Old Norse skaldic poetry, is of a sword as a weapon of ice, sometimes an icicle. However, although Norse texts often liken swords to ice and icicles, they never describe a sword melting with icicles or even like ice. Another such metaphor is of a sword as a burning, radiant candle, an object central to Christian ritual. Of special interest are parallels between the giant sword, which seems to have shone like the sun, *rodores candel* 'the sky's candle' (1572), in the depths of the mere, and a sword called Snarvendill in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, which is described

as a 'corpse-candle'; this radiant sword is conferred on the saga's hero, Hjalmpér, by a female monster called Vargeisa in an episode that looks analogous to Beowulf's encounter with Grendel's mother in the mere. Grendel's mother may also have a parallel, albeit inexact, in a monstrous Norse female called Grýla, known from a variety of sources; she wields another noteworthy 'candle' in the form of a large icicle.

From a Christian perspective, the giant sword's melting, which is compared to God's thawing of the world's ice in springtime, may be interpretable as an intimation of one or two key symbols of Easter. The giant sword, which we may reasonably infer is a prime source of the sun-like radiance which shone in the mere immediately after the beheading of Grendel's mother, might evoke not just a candle but the large Paschal Candle. Especially once reduced to its cross-shaped hilt, it may also intimate the Cross of Christ. This would accord with other indications that *Beowulf's* mere-episode evokes the Eastertide events of the Crucifixion and the Harrowing of Hell, and of the sacrament of baptism. From this viewpoint, the giant sword is highly suggestive of the justice-dispensing weapon of the Judaeo-Christian God.

This, however, is only one of the perspectives required to appreciate the richness of the image of the waning, melting giant sword—and more generally the artistic achievement of *Beowulf*. In my view, we must also recognize the mere-episode's affinities with the nature-mythology of early northwest Europe, especially Anglo-Saxon and Norse traditions about the sun and moon which are likely to have pre-Christian origins. Particularly relevant are traditions about the Scandinavian fertility god called Ingvi/Yngvi, more grandly Yngvi-Freyr, or often just *Freyr* 'Lord', a deity whose powers included control of the sun and the Earth's produce. He is probably broadly equivalent to the remarkable personage known to Anglo-Saxons as Ing, whose name appears at least twice in *Beowulf*, most clearly in titles borne by Hroðgar, king of the Danes: *eodor Ingwina* 'shelter of the Ing-friends' (1044) and *frea Ingwina* 'lord of the Ing-friends' (1319).

These titles suggest a close connection between Hroðgar, his people and Ing. Ing is also linked with the early Danes, and possibly solar swords, by an ambiguous stanza from the *Old English Rune Poem*. This stanza may associate Ing with heavenly light by subtly identifying him as the constellation Boötes, alias the Ploughman, whose appearance

at night heralds the return of the warm sun in springtime; it possibly also identifies him with the diurnal sun. If so, this may indicate that Ing was once a fertility god who sowed his crops by night and grew them by day. The connection between Hroðgar and Ing/Yngvi-Freyr may be strengthened by the former's repeated designation in *Beowulf* as *frea* 'lord', this word being the Old English cognate of ON *Freyr*. Hroðgar, bright lord of the shining hall *Heorot* 'Hart', and the bright god Freyr also share connections with the sun through the concept of the antlered solar hart and the weapons which they and their prime representatives wield.

A key source of information about Freyr and his weaponry is the Old Norse mythological poem *Fǫr Skírnis*. I hope to have shown how, in many respects, this Eddic poem parallels the mere-episode of *Beowulf*, and that these parallels are sufficiently numerous, non-trivial and sequential to suggest independent manifestations of a shared story-pattern. *Fǫr Skírnis* records that Freyr gave his marvellous sword to Skírnir, his servant and likely hypostasis, who had requested it if he was to win for his master the hand of a radiant giantess called Gerðr. It appears likely from *Fǫr Skírnis* and other Norse evidence that Gerðr and her father Gymir (alias the sea-giant Ægir) inhabited a land which was within, under or by the sea or another body of water. Other Norse episodes analogous to *Beowulf* similarly feature giantesses who live within or are found by water. Their evidence strengthens the possibility that the many parallels between *Fǫr Skírnis* and *Beowulf* exist because these texts contain variants of the same (or much the same) underlying myth. On this basis, the sword of Freyr and a second weapon wielded by Skírnir, the mysterious *gambanteinn* (about which more later), may represent counterparts of the two swords wielded by Beowulf during the mere-episode, namely Hrunting and the giant sword.

Subtle clues to the giant sword's association with the mythology of Freyr may also be present in *Beowulf*. Shortly before Beowulf dives into the mere, the poem describes a stag-hunt in such a way as to hint at a shared identity between an antlered *heorot* 'hart' pursued by hounds, the hall *Heorot*, Hroðgar and the (antler-hilted?) giant sword which Beowulf will shortly discover in the mere. It may be relevant that Old Norse tradition records that Freyr killed a giant with a potentially solar antler which took the place of the sword he had given to Skírnir.

More obviously, it appears significant that, upon returning from the mere, Beowulf presents the giant sword's hilt to Hroðgar, the *frea* of Heorot. The poet's threefold description of this presentation indicates the sword's great importance to the Danes. This scene offers no direct clues to the weapon's identity, but its solemnity would suit the return of an ancestral sword—perhaps even a lost sword of Ing/Yngvi-Freyr himself—to its rightful inheritor, arguably the god's earthly representative or incarnation.¹ This return may find parallel in the Old Norse poem *Sólarljóð*'s description of the likely taking of a solar antler, inscribed with runes by Freyr's sisters (possibly personifications of waves), from a dwarf. Furthermore, like the giant sword, the antler of *Sólarljóð* probably also symbolizes the Cross in an episode suggestive of the Harrowing of Hell.

Important too for an understanding of the giant sword and its possible connection to Freyr is the analogous Old Norse sword *Mistilteinn* 'Mistletoe'. According to *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, it was acquired and reacquired in similar circumstances by Hrómundr, a hero comparable to Beowulf and the namesake of Hroðmund, Hroðgar's son. Furthermore, in certain versions of *Heiðreks saga*, *Mistilteinn* is grouped with *Hrotti*, a likely Old Norse equivalent of *Hrunting*,² in a trinity of famous swords possessed by heroes: *Angantýr* had *Tyrfingr*, *Hervarðr* had *Hrotti*, and *Sæmíngr/Semíngr* had *Mistilteinn*.³ Here *Hervarðr* corresponds to OE *Heorowearð*, the son of Hroðgar's elder brother Heorogar in *Beowulf*.⁴ Additionally, the less-than-transparent name of *Mistilteinn*'s owner, *Sæmíngr/Semíngr* (probably better *Sæmíngr*), might be supposed, by folk-etymology at least, to have *sæ* 'sea' as its first element.⁵ If so, this

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- 1 J. Köberl, 'The Magic Sword in *Beowulf*', *Neophilologus* 71 (1987), 120–8 argues that the giant sword had belonged to Heremod, the mighty Danish king of whom Hroðgar speaks after gazing at its hilt. The two proposals are not necessarily incompatible.
 - 2 See Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 52; K. Malone, 'Hrungnir', *ANF* 61 (1946), 284–5 at 285; A. Liberman, 'Beowulf — Grettir', in B. Brogyanyi and T. Krömmelbein (ed.), *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations* (Amsterdam, 1986), 353–401 at 370; *PTP*, 790.
 - 3 Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, I, 416, 515. In the concluding prose to the Eddic *Fáfnismál* 'Lay of Fáfnir' and in *Völsunga saga* (chapter 20), however, the hero Sigurðr takes *Hrotti* from the lair of the dead dragon Fáfnir.
 - 4 It may also be noted that ON *Hervarðr* is not wholly dissimilar in sound to OE (*H*) *unferð*, the Dane who loaned *Hrunting* to Beowulf.
 - 5 He is identifiable with the Swedish King *Semíngr* whom Þráinn defeated in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*; cf. Rafn, *Fornaldar sögur*, I, 416. According to ANEW

might tie in with Mistilteinn's recovery from water in *Hrómundar saga*. More importantly, according to Snorri's prologue to *Heimskringla*, the poem *Háleygjatal* 'Tally of the Háleygir [i.e., people of Hálogaland]' by the tenth-century Norwegian Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnson named Sæmingr as the *sonr Yngvifreys* 'son of Yngvi-Freyr'⁶—although Snorri shortly afterwards contradicts this by identifying him, in *Ynglinga saga*, as the son of Óðinn and Skaði on the basis of a stanza quoted from the same poem.⁷ The fourteenth-century *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* 'Saga of Hálfðan Eysteinsonar' also describes Sæmingr as Óðinn's son, and adds that he married *Nauma*,⁸ a name encountered earlier in this study in association with an aquatic giantess in *Grettis saga*.⁹ If the prologue to *Heimskringla* is not simply wrong about Sæmingr's paternity, given that further evidence suggests that Óðinn appropriated the roles of Freyr,¹⁰ we may say that, despite the discrepancy, we have some basis for linking Mistilteinn with Freyr's close kin. In view of how much Mistilteinn has in common with Beowulf's giant sword, this encourages an association of the latter weapon with the circle of Ing/Yngvi-Freyr. Additionally, among other evidence adduced earlier, we found that an analogous sword called *Sigrljómi* 'Victory-Light' was owned by *Hrólfr*, the Old Norse form of *Hroðulf*, Hroðgar's nephew, and that likely counterparts of Hrunting and the giant sword were wielded by Skírnir, Freyr's hypostasis.

s.v. *Sæmingr* and *ÍO* s.v. *Sæmingur*, *Sémingr*, the name probably means 'Swarthy, Blackish', being related to ON *sámr*; they consider doubtful an alternative appeal to words such as OHG *samo* and Latin *semen* 'seed', which would make *Sæmingr* a 'Seed-Shoot' (i.e., offspring of a seed-god?), although this could suit his possession of a twig-sword and (see shortly) his siring by the fertility god Yngvi-Freyr.

6 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 4.

7 Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 21–2; Whaley, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas* 1, 199–200; the first of the two stanzas quoted in this context identifies Skaði as a (or the) *járnviðja* 'inhabitant of Járnvíðr', on which see Chapters 10 and 14 above. The Prologue to Snorri's *Prose Edda* records that Óðinn proceeded north until he came to the encircling sea, where he installed his son, Sæmingr, over Norway; he then made another of his sons, Yngvi, king in Sweden; *SnEGylf*, 6. *Sæmingr* is also recorded as a theonym; *PTP*, 754, 757; *SnESkald*, I, 113.

8 *FSN*, IV, 247.

9 See Chapter 8.

10 *HG*, 121–3; cf. J. P. Schjødt, 'Óðinn, Þórr and Freyr: Functions and Relations' in M. Kaplan and T. R. Tangherlini (ed.), *News from Other Worlds: Studies in Nordic Folklore, Mythology and Culture in Honor of John F. Lindow* (Berkeley, 2012), 61–91. Conceivably, Eyvindr's poem included evidence for both paternities but emphasized the latter in the stanza quoted by Snorri. Alternatively, in his prologue, Snorri perhaps mistakenly attributed to Eyvindr's poem a piece of information which he actually learnt from elsewhere.

We appear, therefore, to have multiple grounds for linking a weapon such as the giant sword to Freyr and his circle. When we also recall that the Beowulf-analogue Þorsteinn uxafótr gave Ívarr ljómi (probably a late manifestation of Ing) an analogous sword taken from trollish counterparts of Grendel and his mother, it requires no great leap of faith to conclude that Mistilteinn and the giant sword may once have been possessions of Ing/Yngvi-Freyr. Nor does it require a huge imaginative leap to envisage the giant sword as an ancestral heirloom of the Danes, especially as narratives involving a ‘hero (in this case Beowulf) with two swords’, one of which is often a family weapon, are a common feature of Norse sagas.¹¹ Indeed, it is hard to think otherwise when the *Beowulf*-poet identifies the hilt, at the very moment Hroðgar gazes on it, as an old *laf* ‘leaving/heirloom’ (1688), one that had *on æht gehwearf ... Denigea frean* ‘returned(?) into the possession of the *frea* of the Danes’ (1679–80).

If the giant sword was, from a Germanic perspective, once a weapon of the pagan god Ing/Yngvi-Freyr, then, assuming I have interpreted the symbolism correctly, the *Beowulf*-poet’s implicit association of this divine sword with a candle (possibly the Paschal Candle) and with the Cross—and therefore with Christ—may appear surprising in religious terms. Such an association would, however, be explicable for many reasons:

- (a) The heathen god was apparently ‘the son of Man’ (Tacitus’ Mannus), as was Christ.
- (b) The heathen god may well have been ‘god made man’—notably in the form of Hroðgar in *Beowulf*; Gunnarr, the man who takes the place of Freyr in *Ǫgmundar þáttur dytts*; and Ívarr ljómi in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*. Christ was similarly God incarnate.
- (c) The heathen god’s name, in the form *enguz* ‘Ing’, is that of the cross-shaped letter *X* in the Gothic alphabet invented in the fourth century by the Christian Ulfilas;¹² and the Old English *Ing*-rune (ǰ) resembles a double cross. *X* is also the Greek letter *chi*, the first letter in *Χριστός* ‘Christ’, and to this day stands for ‘Christ’ in the abbreviation ‘Xmas’ for ‘Christmas’.

11 See Miller, *Epic Hero*, 209–10. Also, for the sword as a symbol of familial continuity, see Davidson, ‘Sword at the Wedding’.

12 R. W. V. Elliott, *Runes: An Introduction*, 2nd edn. (Manchester, 1989), 63.

- (d) The heathen god's name or title, *Freyr* 'Lord', would invite identification with Christ the Lord.
- (e) The heathen god was closely linked with the sun, as was Christ.
- (f) The heathen god, who wielded an antler, may well have been identified with a stag, as was Christ.
- (g) The heathen god wielded a sword, as did Christ (e.g., *Matthew* 10.34).
- (h) The heathen god appears the most virtuous of the Germanic gods in early Scandinavian sources.¹³ Christ was without sin.
- (i) The heathen god was a bestower of peace and a sponsor of marriage.¹⁴ The reign of the Danish King Fróði III, whom scholars link with Yngvi-Freyr,¹⁵ was associated with the Augustan Peace, during which Christ was born.¹⁶
- (j) The heathen god was one of the Vanir, who seem to have had the ability to resurrect the dead, as did Christ.¹⁷
- (k) The heathen god may be linked to Baldr (see Chapter 10), who dies innocently, descends to Hel and returns from the dead, like Christ.

13 This finding is perhaps surprising, given the Vanir's reputation for incest, which could well be implicit in the paired names *Freyr* 'Lord' and *Freyja* 'Lady'. But whereas *Freyr*'s sister had a reputation for sorcery and promiscuity, he himself does not in surviving Old Norse texts. Indeed, in *Lokasenna* (37) Týr claims that *Freyr* makes no girl or wife weep. Whereas Óðinn is notorious as a gender-changer, an oath-breaker and a worker of disreputable female magic, and Þórr is an oathbreaker and a bulldozer, even Loki can level only lukewarm criticism at *Freyr*: he merely observes in *Lokasenna* that *Freyr* gave his sword away in exchange for *Gerðr*. Saxo, however, does condemn *Frø*, his latinization of *Freyr* (*GD*, I, 154–5).

14 Adam of Bremen, in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (4.26–7), remarks on the god's bestowal of *pacem voluptatemque* 'peace and pleasure' on men, and observes that men sacrificed to him when marriages were to be celebrated; Schmeidler, *Adam vom Bremen*, 258–9. As we have seen, Snorri corroborates the idea that *Freyr* bestowed peace.

15 One reason for the link is that the name Fróði is closely related to *fróðr* 'wise/fertile', an epithet of *Freyr* in *För Skírnis* (1, 2).

16 In Old Norse it is called *Fróðafriðr* 'Fróði's Peace'; see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Heimskringla*, I, 24; A. H. Krappe, 'Yngvi-Frey and Aengus mac Oc', *SS* 17 (1943), 174–8 at 174–5.

17 The Greek mythological figure of Triptolemus, whom I compared with Ing in Chapter 6, also granted hope for the afterlife through his involvement in the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Additionally, that Yngvi-Freyr was accommodated into a Christian world-view is shown by his depiction, alongside Óðinn and Þórr, on a twelfth-century tapestry from Skog Church in Hälsingland, Sweden.¹⁸ Ingi was also the name of a Swedish king (died c. 1110) who suppressed paganism and suffered for his Christianity; he was betrayed by a close kinsman and driven from the land after his people conducted a horse sacrifice (to the heathen Ingi/Yngvi-Freyr?), but later returned and restored the Christian faith.¹⁹ Also noteworthy is the figure of Ingimundr Þorsteinsson in *Vatnsdæla saga*. Together, his name and representation suggest an amalgam of aspects of Ing/Freyr, including possibly his sword, and the medieval Christian notion of the noble heathen.²⁰

If the giant sword were, from a Germanic perspective, originally a weapon of Ing, this identification raises the prospect, which I mention tentatively, of an underlying link with the sword's Judaeo-Christian aspect, one based on the inscription on its hilt.

The giant sword's hilt records, probably at least partly in runes, or ... *fyrngewinnes* 'the origin of ancient strife' (1688–9). The nature of that strife is uncertain, but, as Dennis Cronan has argued, a prime candidate must be the first murder, namely Cain's killing of his brother Abel, which is introduced early in the poem in connection with Grendel (102–10) and mentioned again in connection with Grendel and his mother shortly before her attack on Heorot (1258–67).²¹ The poet's vagueness about both the original owner of the ancient giant sword and its inscription encourages the speculation that, from a Judaeo-Christian

18 See T. I. Leiren, 'From Pagan to Christian: The Story in the 12th-Century Tapestry of the Skog Church, Hälsingland, Sweden', <http://faculty.washington.edu/leiren/skog.html>; Murphy, *Tree*, 60–5.

19 Tolkien, *Saga*, 62–3.

20 See L. van Wezel, 'Mythology as a Mnemonic and Literary Device in *Vatnsdæla saga*', in A. Andrén, K. Jennbert and C. Raudvere (ed.), *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions: An International Conference in Lund, Sweden, June 3–7, 2004* (Lund, 2006), 289–92 at 289–90. Additionally, J. Büschgens, '*Vatnsdæla saga* and Onomastics: The Case of Ingimundr Þorsteinsson', in A. Hey *et al.*, *Á austvoega*, I, 160–6 at 164 observes that the 'depiction of Ingimundr as a saintlike figure is quite remarkable for someone who earlier on seemed to have a special relationship to the pagan god Freyr Freyr might have been less problematic as a prefiguration of the Christian god than giant slaying Þórr or the sorcerer Óðinn. At some point Ingimundr seems to have realized that Freyr is just a shell for the "real" divine guide of his fortunes, the one who created the sun and the whole world'.

21 Cronan, 'Origin'. Note also Hroðgar's designation of Grendel as *ealdgewinna* (1776) 'the old adversary' and of his actions against Heorot as *eald gewin* 'old strife' (1781).

perspective, it might be the very weapon by which Cain became the 'edge/sword-slayer' (*ecgbanan* 1262) of Abel.

This raises the possibility of a specific underlying point of connection between the poem's heathen Germanic and Judaeo-Christian perspectives. For in both cases the giant sword might then be the possession of a fratricidal ploughman. On the Germanic side we could have Ing, the celestial Ploughman (Boötes), who, as Freyr, slew giants, including Beli, who were brothers to his wife, the giantess Gerðr. On the Judaeo-Christian side, we could have the fratricide Cain as *agricola* 'farmer/ploughman' in the *Vulgate* (*Genesis* 4:2), as one who *operabatur terram* 'worked the earth' in the *Old Latin Bible*, and as one who, according to the fifth-century poet Cyprianus Gallus, *curvo terram vertebat aratro* 'turned the earth with a curved plough'.²² In either case, the ploughman's sword might originally have been his plough's detachable and hafted coulter.²³

An agricultural aspect to the giant sword would be in keeping with the use of Skírnir's analogous weaponry, which may bring about the arrival of spring in *För Skírnis*. Thus Skírnir threatens to strike Gerðr, whose name and associations with frost (compare the analogous giantess *Hríngerðr* 'Frosty Enclosed Ground') suggest, in one respect, a frozen field in winter, which yields to Freyr, the 'fair-weather traveller', in a meeting on 'Barley-Isle' in springtime.²⁴ In *Beowulf*, the giant sword melts after use, inspiring a comparison with the vernal thaw; also the dark, forbidding landscape described before the giants' defeat is mentioned no more—the returning men simply take a *cuþe stræte* 'known road' (1634), one suggestive of the *foldwegas* 'earth-ways' thought to be *fægere* 'fair' and *cystum cuðe* 'known to be choice' for

22 See Cross and Hill, *Prose Solomon and Saturn*, 100–1.

23 G. Henderson, 'Cain's Jaw-Bone', *JWCI* 24 (1961), 108–14 at 110–11 suggests that the large cleaver-like weapon with which Cain kills Abel on the ninth- or tenth-century Irish Muiredach's Cross is a coulter. A Hebrew work of uncertain date which purports to be the Biblical *Book of Jasher* attests such a belief: 'And Cain hastened and rose up, and took the iron part of his ploughing instrument, with which he suddenly smote his brother and he slew him'; M. M. Noah, *Sefer ha-Yashar: The Book of Jasher; referred to in Joshua and Second Samuel* (New York, 1840), 3 (1:25).

24 I consider this interpretation of *För Skírnis* supplementary to that proposed below, in which the sun-controlling god Freyr/Skírnir marries the lunar giantess Gerðr. An individual myth may support multiple interpretations, especially as it is liable to accrue new meanings as it evolves through time and space. Cf. Dubois, 'Mythic Sun', 218–9.

horse-racing after the dismemberment of Grendel (864–7).²⁵ Beowulf, it also appears, would make a fine wielder of a celestial ploughman's sword since, as both 'Bee-Wolf' (i.e., 'Bear')²⁶ and watchman against Grendel, he suggests not just *Ursa Major* 'the Great Bear', a constellation associated with Boötes (Greek *Arctophylax* 'Bear-Watcher/Guardian'), but also the golden *Arcturus* 'Bear-Guardian', Boötes' brightest star.²⁷ In this respect, Beowulf, who emerges like a bear in springtime from near-death in Grendel's lair, may not just be representative of Ing the Ploughman, but in a sense actually *part* of him.²⁸

That the episode at the heart of *Beowulf* should have a basis in agricultural myth would also be in keeping with the poem's opening. There we hear of Scyld *Scefing* 'Son of Sheaf' and the arrival of *Beow* 'Barley', whose *blæd wide sprang* 'glory/leaf sprang widely' (18).²⁹ It may be no coincidence either that the most famous monster-slayer of all, St. George, was also a ploughman, etymologically at least (Greek *Georgios*, literally 'earth-worker', i.e., 'ploughman'); and he, too, was often imagined as a bringer of springtime.³⁰

Returning to *Beowulf*'s stag-hunt, we find that this passage not only hints at the relevance of Freyr-mythology, but also offers a clue to how

25 W. Helder, 'Beowulf and Typological Symbolism' (unpublished masters thesis, University of McMaster, 1971), 48, <https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/10003/1/fulltext.pdf>; H. Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1996), 142–3.

26 I incline to the view that, whichever came first, both **Beow-wulf* 'Barley-Wolf' and *Beo-wulf* 'Bee-Wolf' (i.e., Bear) are senses relevant to the poem's interpretation.

27 On the other hand, classical authors often associated Arcturus with storms, and Virgil indicated that it impeded farmers' work; Allen, *Star Names*, 99.

28 Cf. *Heofon rece swealg* 'Heaven swallowed the smoke (from Beowulf's pyre)' (3155), which hints that Beowulf's soul ends up in the sky. It is also of interest that the German celestial cartographer Johann Bayer (1572–1625) knew Arcturus as *Gladius* 'Sword'; Allen, *Star Names*, 101–2.

29 See further Tolley, 'Beowulf's Scyld Scefing Episode'; Bruce, *Scyld and Scef*; W. Sayers, 'The Names *Bēow*, *Scēf*, *Scyld* and *Bēowulf*: Shares into Swords', *ES* 97 (2016), 815–20. Relevant to the mere-episode of *Beowulf* and its reference to the Flood may be Fulk, 'Eddic Analogue', which identifies an Old Norse myth involving the milling of grain-giants—a myth which, it appears likely, Snorri turned into a version of the destruction of almost all giants by the Flood, the exceptions being one male giant (Bergelmir), his wife and their household (compare Grendel, his mother and the other creatures of the mere?). Note, too, the interpretation of the name *Beowulf* as **Beow-wulf* 'Barley Wolf', and the suggestion of 'grinding' in the name *Grendel*.

30 See S. Riches, *St George: A Saint for All* (London, 2015), 72. Additionally, Riches observes that St. George was invoked in medieval English charms against the 'mare', a type of monster with which Grendel's mother (a likely counterpart to *Sinmara*) has something in common.

the giant sword may, in the back-story, have come to be confined in the mere's depths. The pursuit of this hart by hounds suggests the predation on Heorot of the wolfish mere-giants in whose lair the sword resides; this prompts the suspicion that the giants in some way seized this sword, which they never use, from an associated figure. Although two Old Norse texts raise the alternative possibility that, like Mistilteinn and Angrvaðill, the giant sword fell into the water's depths after being dislodged from its bearer's hand during a fight with an evil foe (see Chapter 15), I suspect a seizure by the *heorowearh* 'sword-thief' (1267) Grendel using his glove-bag, quite possibly to satisfy his *heorogifre* 'sword-greedy' (1498) mother and to bring darkness to Heorot.

Again, Old Norse literature supplies potentially illuminating parallels. In a late version of *Heiðreks saga*, a stag-hunt precedes the acquisition of a beautiful and probably solar sword from a dwarf, who probably stole part of the sun in order to forge it. *Beowulf's* stag-hunt is also suggestive of northern myths about the pursuit and capture of the sun—represented on the Gosforth Cross and elsewhere in early European tradition by an antlered stag—by one or more wolves or lupine monsters (Sköll, Hati, Fenrir; probably also Garmr and Mánagarmr). These myths appear to be inspired by celestial phenomena including solar eclipses, the wolfish predators then being manifestations of the dark moon which seems to overtake and devour the sun; parhelia ('sun-dogs'); and the moon's taking of sunlight in the evening, before being overcome by the returning sun in the morning.

The likely relevance to *Beowulf's* mere-episode of myths about the moon's acquisition and subsequent relinquishing of sunlight is reinforced by other Anglo-Saxon and Norse evidence, which includes analogues in the form of a riddle and an obscure metrical charm.

Old English *Riddle 29* describes a horned creature (a crescent moon) which stole a vessel of light and attempted to take it home, only for another creature (the sun) to arrive, overcome the thief and reclaim its lost radiance. The lunar thief has much in common with Grendel, while the light's recovery is suggestive of *Beowulf's* acquisition of the probably radiant giant sword and presentation of it to Hroðgar, lord of the sun-like Heorot, on whose behalf he undertook the adventure.

The Old English metrical charm *Wið dweorh* seems to be informed by a similar myth involving a mythological dwarf-horse-stag(?)—somewhat

suggestive of Grendel—who, either by seizing a solar draught-horse or possessing and thereby taking the form of one, had made off with sunlight, which was later reclaimed by a questing solar creature. This finding is important partly because it indicates that a myth about the loss of sunlight to an evil creature, and its recovery by a solar being, was probably part of heathen Anglo-Saxon tradition. It is also significant because dwarves have distinct lunar connections in Old Norse literature, where the highly specific and peculiar concept of the dwarf-horse-stag recurs and may be embodied by the dwarf Dvalinn. It was Dvalinn who seems to have stolen the sun (to his undoing), rather as the dwarf-horse-stag(?) Vígdvalinn possessed a solar antler in *Sólarljóð*. It was also Dvalinn who forged the sword which shone like the sun in *Heiðreks saga*, presumably using sunlight he had stolen. Given the apparent broad agreement between Old English and Old Norse traditions that a dwarf made off with the sun or sunlight, it is noteworthy that Old Norse dwarves are close kin to giants, and that at least one dwarf-thief, Alvíss (possibly an alias of Dvalinn himself), had the appearance of a giant. This encourages the suspicion that nocturnal giants such as Grendel and his mother also stole sunlight, which was subsequently recovered.

This suspicion strengthens when other Old Norse evidence is considered. Old Norse giants and trolls, especially lupine ones, certainly desire the sun, and the most famous and terrible of them, Fenrir, will eventually succeed in devouring it. Of particular interest for the study of *Beowulf* in this regard are episodes from two sagas that may preserve memories of the possession of a stolen solar sword by a lunar giant or similar creature.

In *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, the hero learns of the whereabouts of the sword Mistilteinn from an old man called *Máni* ‘Moon’. *Máni* is not a giant, but he directs Hrómundr to the sword’s current owner, who effectively is: an undead, trollish monster called *Práinn* who lives in a dark burial-mound containing magically pilfered treasure. *Práinn* bears a strong similarity to both Grendel and his mother. He also bears what is otherwise a dwarf-name.

More striking still is the testimony of *Sörla saga sterka*, in which the eponymous hero (again analogous to *Beowulf*) overcomes a giantess called *Mána* ‘Moon’ (comparable to Grendel’s mother) and requires her to present him with a remarkable sword. This she does a month later,

having stolen it. The following features identify this sword as a likely symbol of sunlight stolen by the moon: the weapon's magical theft by a giantess closely comparable to Grendel's mother; its likely kinship with the sword *Sigrljómi*; and a delay in its acquisition that reflects the length of the lunar cycle.

Also significant are traditions about the Man in the Moon and related figures in English and Norse sources. These include thirteenth- and fourteenth-century and post-medieval English sources which describe the Man as a gatherer of thorny sticks—originally, I suspect, sunbeams, which may once also have been imagined as shining 'twig-swords'. The Man, who was depicted as a thief with a dog, and who was associated (like Grendel and his mother) with Cain, gathered these sticks on a large fork. This fork is a distinctive feature which finds likely parallel in Old Norse sources, some of which may otherwise appear fantastically arbitrary, even incoherent. Chief among these is the Eddic poem *Völuspá*, which, I have argued, refers to a murderous lupine troll who acquires sunlight on a pitchfork on behalf of his mother, an old, nameless, wolfish giantess who inhabits what is probably a wooded bog. Her implicit desire for sunlight, together with her locale's correspondence to the site of the imprisonment of the 'dead' female moon in a Lincolnshire folk-tale, encourages identification of her more specifically with the dark (i.e., new) moon. She even appears to correspond to Grendel's old, nameless, wolfish mother, who similarly dwells in a wooded, boggy lake, one which burns by night with what are probably the blueish, moonlight-like flames of *ignis fatuus*. Furthermore, the Old Norse giantess's pitchforker offspring may correspond to Grendel, whose arm and hand tipped with steel-like nails—possibly subtly described as an *unheoru* 'un/bad-sword' (987)—appear broadly comparable to a large fork. If this is correct, Grendel, who has been called 'the most interesting monster of the Middle Ages',³¹ grows yet more intriguing.

Further support for the proposition that Grendel and his mother were identified with the moon, especially in its implicitly acquisitive dark phase, may come from their repeated association with the noun *nið*. This Old English word, I have proposed, may sometimes mean 'waning/dark (phase of the) moon', as ON *nið* does. Additionally, Grendel is repeatedly

31 J. B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, 2000), 107.

associated with OE *wan(n)/won(n)*, a word indicative of darkness and deprivation and suggestive of the moon's waning. Moreover, within *Beowulf*, the exclusively nocturnal predations of Grendel and his mother, and of the climactic dragon, should be remembered, along with their likely stimuli. Grendel was enraged by the sound of a poet singing of the creation of the *wlítebeorhtne wang* 'beautifully bright plain' of the Earth (93) and of *sunnan ond monan* 'the sun and moon', the *leoman* 'luminaries' which served to *leohte landbuendum* 'as light for land-dwellers' (94–5). The dragon—a *niðdraca* 'dark-moon(?) drake'—was enraged by the theft from its lair of a precious cup, a plausible solar symbol. If this third monster corresponds to the dark-moon dragon *Niðhoggr* of *Völuspá*, then all three of *Beowulf's* main monsters have counterparts in the most important poem of Old Norse mythology.

Parallels in preceding Old English texts in the manuscript containing *Beowulf*, and in Old Norse literature and art more generally, also support the identification of a lunar/solar theme within *Beowulf* and of a lunar aspect to its monsters. They include:

- (a) The description by the Old English translator of the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, which immediately precedes *Beowulf* in the manuscript, of a murderous creature with a moon-like head (*Quasi Caput Luna*). This creature's description is likely to have been influenced by that of Grendel and Grendel's mother in *Beowulf*.
- (b) The focus of the end of the *Letter of Alexander* on the Trees of the Sun and Moon.
- (c) The correspondence between Grendel's mere and the Lake of the Moon in *The Wonders of the East*, the text preceding the *Letter of Alexander* in the manuscript.³²
- (d) The close connection between the revenant *Glámr* 'Gleam/Moon', an Old Norse analogue (or partial derivative) of Grendel, and the moon in *Grettis saga*.
- (e) The similarities between Grendel's mother and other Norse giantesses identified or associated with the moon or the

32 In addition, the fact that Grendel and his mother lived in a sea-like mere would render them subject to the force of the moon, whose link to the tides was known to Bede.

darkest nights, which include Hyndla, Þorgunna and, we shall find, Gerðr.

- (f) The presence of a fiery wolf-headed dragon, which probably represents the dark moon seeking to devour (i.e., eclipse) the sun, on the Gosforth Cross.
- (g) The reference in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* to a sword of heavenly light called *Angrvaðill* 'Grief-Wane', which was at one time owned (probably unrightfully) by a gibbous moon-giant and which killed his fork-wielding son.

All in all, the weight of this and other evidence that I have gathered—albeit that it is mainly comparative and much later than a seventh- or eighth-century *Beowulf*—gives us reason to believe that the mere-episode in *Beowulf* and its immediate aftermath may reflect an underlying myth in which wolfish lunar giants stole or arrogated and hid sunlight, which was subsequently repossessed by a sword-wielding agent of the sun. In addition to Grendel's description as a *heorowearh* and his mother's greed for swords, this proposal gains credibility from the presence in *Beowulf* of a fairly widespread theme of thievery, starting with Grendel's taking of 'Bright-Danes' from Heorot and culminating in the theft of a precious (solar?) cup from the dragon's den. The poet may even equip Grendel with an admirably suitable bag in which to purloin fiery loot: the giant has a dragon-skin (which is to say fire-resistant) glove which doubles as a swag-bag. In *Beowulf* the stolen sunlight, I propose, is symbolized by the radiant giant sword of the weather-god who controls the sun, namely Ing/Yngvi-Freyr. Grendel and his mother—the latter possibly the giant sword's specific guardian—were defeated by Beowulf, who, by no coincidence, was both a prince of the *Weder-Geatas* 'We(a)ther-Geatas' (1492, 1612) and the emissary (and virtual son) of Hroðgar, lord of the sun-like hall to which the shining golden hilt was brought. And with this huge, implicitly solar hilt, Beowulf brought its counterpart, Grendel's huge head, which may symbolize the conquered, dead moon—at once a terrible (*egeslic* 1649) spectacle and a beautiful sight (*wliteseon* 1650). In short, I suggest that Beowulf returns to Heorot effectively bearing two disembodied heads of celestial significance: a cross-shaped sword-head, which symbolizes the blazing sun, and Grendel's head, which symbolizes the dead moon—a combination paralleled on an Anglo-Saxon grave-marker from Lindisfarne.

The full picture, however, is not quite *that* straightforward, as *Beowulf* appears neatly to combine not one but two myths about the theft and repossession of sunlight. The second myth is latent in the description of Grendel's mother as a sword-greedy *brimwylf* 'sea-she-wolf'—in other words, I have suggested, as a monstrous fish with an appetite for swords—and in the impression of identity between her and the waters of the mere she inhabits. As a pike or other predatory fish hungry for a sword, she and her similarly acquisitive mere may correspond to similar fish of medieval Norse and later-recorded Finnish myths, which variously swallow the sword Mistilteinn, eggs that give rise to the sun, or a spark of heavenly fire. When *Beowulf* beheaded Grendel's mother, it seems implicit that the sudden appearance of sunlight came not just from the giant sword but also from her opened body.

If, in the back-story, Grendel and his mother stole and concealed the sun-god's sword, we may wonder why they did so. I suggest it was partly because they were dark-lunar water-dwellers envious of the radiance given to land-dwellers (*landbuendum* 95) in a narrativization of the natural phenomenon of the moon's appropriation of light from the sun. From a Judaeo-Christian perspective, a clue to such a motivation may survive in an Old English prose tract recording a dialogue between Solomon and Saturn. The wise Solomon declares that the eyes of the anthropomorphized Pater Noster are twelve thousand times brighter than the Earth, even if it were covered with the brightest lily flowers, and each flower's leaf had twelve suns and each flower twelve moons, and each moon were twelve thousand times brighter than *ieo wæs ær Abeles slege* 'it was of old before Abel's slaying'.³³ From this passage we

33 Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, 74. Another Old English prose text records that on the fourth day of Creation God set the sun and moon in the sky and *þa wæs seo sunne seofon siðum beorhtre ðonne heo nu is, ond se mona hæfde ða ða beorhtnesse þe seo sunne nu hæfað. Ac þa Adam ond Eua on neorxnawonge gesyngodan, ða wæs þæm tunglum gewonad heora beorhtnes, ond hi næfdon na siððan butan þone seofodan dæl heora leohtes* 'then the sun was seven times brighter than it is now, and the moon had then the brightness that the sun now has. But when Adam and Eve sinned in paradise, then the brightness of those heavenly bodies was dimmed, and since then they have had only the seventh part of their (former) light'; Rauer, *Old English Martyrology*, 68. Cf. C. D. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1993), 250 n. 129. See also MIFL, motif A755.6 'Moon's phases as punishment for moon's misdoing.' On the consequences of Abel's murder according to other Anglo-Saxon authors, see C. D. Wright, 'The Blood of Abel and the Branches of Sin: *Genesis A*, *Maxims I* and Aldhelm's *Carmen de uirginitate*', ASE 25 (1996), 7–19.

may reasonably infer a tradition that the moon lost much of its light after Cain murdered Abel, whether due to grief or punishment. Given this evidence, we may also entertain the possibility that a passage from the Old English poem *Maxims I* which repeatedly uses the word *nið* alludes to—or encouraged—a tradition that the moon's waning or dark phase originated from this crime. In the following context *nið* clearly means principally 'hostility, malice', but, as sometimes in *Beowulf*, it perhaps also hints at the sense 'lunar wane/darkness':

Wearð fæhþo fyra cynne, siþþan furþum swealg
 eorðe Abeles blode. Næs þæt andæge nið,
 of þam wrohtdropan wide gesprungon,
 micel mon ældum, monegum þeodum
 bealoblonden niþ. Slog his broðor swæsne
 Cain, þone cwealm nered; cuþ wæs wide siþþan,
 þæt ece nið ældum scod, swa aþolwarum. (*ASPR* 3, 192–8)

Feuding befell the race of men just as soon as Abel's blood was swallowed by the earth. That was no one-day *nið*: from it there sprang enmity-drops widely, great wickedness for men [or 'from those enmity drops there sprang widely great wickedness for men'], for many peoples bale-blended *nið*. He slew his sweet brother, Cain (did), the one whom death spared; it was widely known then that eternal *nið* harmed men, as to pestilence-dwellers(?).³⁴

Given the moon's association with Cain in medieval tradition, much of its light was perhaps confiscated as a punishment by God, who may also have placed dark 'marks' on the moon, just as he placed a 'mark' on Cain—but this is only a guess. Certainly, Grendel and his mother were descendants of Cain, whose fratricide the poet twice mentions when introducing them. Therefore, they may have stolen the solar giant sword partly in an attempt to restore the moon's former luminosity (which is also to say theirs) or to spite the undimmed sun—or both. As giants of both Germanic and Judaeo-Christian worlds, they probably also stole and concealed the giant sword to prevent its use against them by the sun-god.

It remains to elucidate the analogous myths behind the poems *Svipdagsmál* and *För Skírnis*, which may shed further light on the nature

34 On the interpretation of this passage, see Wright, 'Blood of Abel', 12–14.

of the giant sword, Hrunting, and the relationship between the sun and moon. These texts appear to preserve similar myths about the theft or other acquisition of sunlight by dwarves and giants linked with the moon.

An important clue to the interpretation of *Svipdagsmál* lies in the name of its hero, *Svipdagr*, a compound of the nouns *svipr* and *dagr*. The former noun has a variety of meanings: ‘swoop’, ‘sudden loss’, ‘glimpse of a person, a fleeting, evanescent appearance’, ‘look, countenance’, ‘likeness’.³⁵ The latter means simply ‘day’. *Svipdagr*, therefore, means ‘swooping day’, ‘sudden loss of day’, ‘fleeting day’ or ‘likeness of day’.³⁶ This finding admits an interpretation of *Svipdagr*, son of *Sólbjartr* ‘Sun-Bright’, as a personification of the daylight-radiating sun. More specifically, he may represent a sun that has been temporarily dimmed, perhaps by eclipse or nightfall, or, in view of the poem’s references to coldness, by winter—the season when the sun is weakest and the days shortest.³⁷

Svipdagr, it seems, fundamentally goes in quest of lost solar light. This light is symbolized both by the submerged twig-sword *Lævateinn*, which he probably acquires to free his destined bride (perhaps by killing the giantess *Sinmara*), and the *sólbjartr* ‘sun-bright’ *Menglóð* herself, whom he certainly wins. *Lævateinn* was originally taken by the arch-thief *Loki* from a radiant branch of the world-tree and then guarded beneath a whirlpool (*lúðr*) by *Sinmara*, a pale giantess. She shares her deathly, moon-like pallor with the giant-like dwarf *Alviss*, and her implicit nature as a *mara* ‘mare’-monster suggests a kinship with the ‘mare’-like attack of *Grendel*’s mother on *Beowulf*. *Menglóð*, for her part, gives the impression of being restricted to the golden castle that she rules, which was built at least partly by ‘sun-blind’ dwarves—a race associated with the moon, the theft and concealment of sunlight, and the manufacture and possession of solar weapons—and guarded by two dogs (one *parhelion*/sun-dog and one *paraselene*/moon-dog?). If, rather than the moon, *Menglóð* simply personifies the light lost by

35 CV s.v. Note also the poetic ‘sword’-terms *svipuðr* ‘swooper’ and *svipaljótr* ‘ugly swooper’ in *PTP*, 796–7.

36 Robinson, ‘Edition’, 345 explains the name as ‘passing expression, appearance (*svipr*) of day’; Simek, *Dictionary*, 307 as approximately ‘the suddenly dawning day’; and A. M. Sturtevant, ‘The Old Norse Proper Name *Svipdagr*’, *SS* 30 (1958), 30–34 at 34 as ‘The Magical *Dagr* [Day]’.

37 In the far north, of course, the sun does not rise at all during wintry nights. Zavaroni, ‘Mead’, 84 argues that *Svipdagr* is ‘a god of the winter sun’.

the sun during winter, her confinement to a dwarf-made stronghold surrounded by flicker-flame (*ignis fatuus?*) may still implicate the moon in her separation.

Svipdagr's implicit liberation of Menglǫð from the body of the fortress *Lýr* 'Pollack/Whitefish/Pike/Fish', which quivered on the tip of a pointed weapon, suggests an underlying parallel, otherwise obscured, with both the excision of Mistilteinn from a pike in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* and that of the sun from a pike or other fish in Finnish tradition. Additionally, although hardly diagnostic on its own, the name *Menglǫð* 'Necklace-Glad' calls to mind Freyja,³⁸ the goddess who delighted in the doubtless gleaming *Brísingamen* and who was lusted after by giants and dwarves. *Freyja*, as 'Lady' and one of the incestuous *Vanir*, may well have been the sexual partner of *Freyr* 'Lord'. It is, therefore, probably no coincidence that *Svipdagr* has much in common with *Freyr/Skírnir* and with *Óðinn*, who, we noted earlier, seems to have appropriated aspects of *Freyr's* mythology.³⁹ If *Svipdagr* does (or did) represent *Freyr*, and if *Menglǫð* represents *Freyja*, their sexual union would encourage the idea that the confined *Menglǫð* once personified the moon (perhaps with Baily's beads), as Norse tradition identifies the sun and moon as siblings,⁴⁰ and that, as in *Fǫr Skírnis* (the poem which has most in common with *Svipdagsmál*), they were married.

In *Fǫr Skírnis*, *Skírnir*, representative of the solar *Freyr*, similarly sets out to claim a radiant, but fire-enclosed and almost inaccessible female, in this case the giantess *Gerðr*. She does not appear to be imprisoned but rather content to live in her father's home, a place apparently surrounded by or beneath the sea. Her radiant arms might initially be thought to identify her as a solar creature, but I believe her frostiness and the likelihood that the fire protecting her home is a nocturnal *ignis fatuus* points rather to a waxing lunar or plenilunar

38 Although no surviving myth tells of an abduction of *Freyja* by dwarves or giants, she was desired by both races. Dwarves have sex with her by night in *Sörla þáttr*. The giant *Prymr* (compare the gate *Prymgjöll* of *Menglǫð's* stronghold in *Fjolsvinismál* 10) demands her in exchange for *Pórr's* hammer in *Drymskviða*. A giant-builder hired by the gods requests her as payment, along with the sun and the moon, in *SnEGylf*, 34–6.

39 For differing views about *Svipdagr's* identity, see Rydberg, *Teutonic Mythology*, I, 153; Robinson, 'Edition', 343–6; Heide, 'Fjolsvinismál', 188–92.

40 See Chapter 8 n. 72. In addition, the Old Norse term *hlýrn*, which can denote the sun and moon, may mean 'pair of twins; brother and sister', being related to *hlýri* 'brother'; see *PTP*, 914–5.

figure lit by appropriated sunlight. If so, *Fǫr Skírnis* dramatizes a sun-controlling god's repossession of sunlight by overcoming and securing a forthcoming union with a lunar giantess.⁴¹

Another trace of Gerðr's fundamentally lunar nature may survive in Freyr's impatient observation that, in waiting for his meeting with Gerðr, a *mánaðr* 'month' has often seemed shorter to him than a single night, a month being essentially the length of a lunar cycle. Nevertheless, this lunar aspect of Gerðr is obscure in *Fǫr Skírnis*. It is, however, made clearer by parallels with her half-namesake, the giantess Hrímgærðr, who appears to be the daughter of the sun-hunting, and therefore implicitly lunar, wolf Hati. Appreciation of Gerðr's lunar essence is also strengthened by the parallel between her and the initially hostile but subsequently friendly giantess *Mána* 'Moon' in *Sörla saga sterka* (whose existence confirms that the medieval Norse moon was sometimes female).⁴² It is also bolstered, I believe, by parallels between Gerðr and the hunchback (gibbous) troll-woman Margerðr, daughter of a probably lunar giant in *Hjálmþés saga*, and between Gerðr and Grendel's mother.

A further clue to Gerðr's involvement in a solar/lunar myth may be the puzzling term *gambanteinn* which apparently describes the weapon with which Skírnir overcame Gerðr. Whereas the word's second element, *-teinn*, means 'twig', the meaning and etymology of the initial element *gamban-* are obscure.⁴³ Encouraged, however, by the affinity between *Beowulf's* mere-episode and *Fǫr Skírnis*, and by the presence in the northern Danelaw and Norway of several Anglo-Saxon sword-pommels bearing solar and lunar imagery in the ninth or tenth century (see below),

41 There are widespread parallels to the notion that the sun marries the moon; see *MIFL*, motif A736.1.4, 'Sun and moon married'. The idea that *Fǫr Skírnis* describes some (other) sort of *hieros gamos* 'sacred marriage' is not new; see, for example, G. Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi* (Larvik, 1991); S. G. Eriksen, 'Popular Culture and Royal Propaganda in Norway and Iceland in the 13th century', *Collegium Mediævale* 20 (2007), 99–135. Snorri refers to the marriage of a female called *Sól* 'Sun', sister of a male *Máni* 'Moon', to a certain *Glennr* 'Brilliant One(?)', a union which angered the gods; *SnEGylf*, 13; see also *PTP*, 367–8 and *SnESkald*, I, 39.

42 *Mána's* changing disposition, from hostile to friendly, is itself consistent with the alternately dark and radiant faces of the moon. On such ambiguousness in some other lunar females, see M. O. Lee, 'Per Nubila Lunam: The Moon in Virgil's *Aeneid*', *Vergilius (1959-)* 34 (1988), 9–14.

43 For suggestions, see *ANew* and *ÍO* s.v. *gamban-*. For earlier studies of this word, see A. G. van Hamel, 'Gambanteinn', *Neophilologus* 17 (1932), 136–43, 234–9; Sturtevant, 'Three Old Norse Words', 109–11; von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, Bd. 2, 126, 203; Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 411–2.

I suggest that *gambanteinn* may be a partial calque of an OE **gambantan*, with *-tan* ‘twig’ translated as *-teinn* but *gamban-* left unchanged. Elsewhere in Old Norse *gamban-* has been said to serve as an indicator of magnitude, magical potency or divine power: it appears in the terms *gambanreiði* ‘*gamban-wrath*’, which describes the gods’ anger at Gerðr’s rebuttal of Skírnir in *För Skírnis* 33, and *gambansumbl* ‘*gamban-feast*’, which describes a feast of the gods in the hall of Ægir/Gymir in *Lokasenna* 8.⁴⁴ If such is indeed its significance, I suggest it is a secondary development for an originally foreign word, the precise meaning of which was unappreciated or had been forgotten, but which maintained associations with power and was linked with the giants Gerðr and Ægir/Gymir.

The origin of *gamban-* lies rather, I suggest, in an Old English noun meaning ‘tribute’ whose nominative singular form is somewhat uncertain: *gambe/gombe*, *gamba/gomba* or *gamban/gomban*.⁴⁵ This word is attested only twice. The first instance is in the phrase *gomban gyldan* ‘to pay tribute’, which occurs amid a veiled agricultural myth with possible solar connotations at the start of *Beowulf* (11),⁴⁶ the tribute’s recipient being *Scyld Scefing* ‘Shield son of Sheaf [= Ing?]’, mythical ancestor of the Danes. The second instance is in the same phrase in the Old English Biblical poem *Genesis A* (*gombon gieldan*, 1978), where it describes tribute long paid to the Elamites but now withheld by the defenders of the city of Sodom, to their downfall.⁴⁷ The word is probably related to Old Saxon *gambra* ‘tax’ (though the *-r-* in the latter word is puzzling), which is similarly used with *geldan* ‘to pay’.⁴⁸

If this explanation of *gambanteinn* is correct, or alternatively if ON *gamban-* is simply cognate and synonymous with OE *gambe/gambe/*

44 Dronke, *Poetic Edda*, II, 411–2.

45 In Old English, *a* before a nasal consonant may be rounded to *o*. The *DOE* entry for this word is ? *gambe*, which identifies it as a weak feminine noun (again with a question mark). I am not the first to relate ON *gamban-* to this Old English word; Sturtevant, ‘Three Old Norse Words’, 111 argues that senses such as ‘payment’ and ‘tribute’ are secondary, West Germanic developments from a Proto-Germanic root **gamb-* meaning ‘magic power’.

46 *KB*’s glossary entry is headed ‘*gombe* (wk.f.?) (-a?, -an?)’.

47 D. Anlezark (ed. and trans.), *Old Testament Narratives* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2011), 138.

48 *BT* s.v. *gombe*; *AEW* s.v. *gambe*. Cronan, ‘Poetic Words’, 29 considers that the Old English noun has ‘been inherited from the West Germanic poetic lexicon and that its appearance in only *Beowulf* and *Genesis A* is an indication of the conservatism of these poems.’

gamban, ON *gambanteinn* would mean ‘tribute’s twig’, ‘twig of tribute’ or ‘tribute-twig’.⁴⁹ This could be a term for a *sunbeam*, a solar *ray* (from Latin *radius*, literally ‘staff, rod’) or a ‘shaft’ of sunlight with which the sun or its emissary struck the reluctant, delaying moon-giant in order to extract a ‘tribute/payment’ of light each morning.⁵⁰ Or, more likely, since at least one of the two *gambanteinar* came from a giant, it could be a term for the extracted solar tribute itself, with which the sun or its emissary then struck the transgressing moon.

We may recall how, in other Old Norse texts, and probably in traditions about the Man in the Moon, the sun’s beams are imagined as twig-like rune-staves and thorny sticks. We may also recollect how, according to *Svipdagsmál*, Loki had taken the presumably luminous *Lævateinn* from the radiant *Mimameiðr* ‘Mimi’s tree/branch’ down to the submerged home of the likely lunar giantess *Sinmara*. *Mimameiðr* probably constitutes a variant of the world-wood called the *holt* of *Hoddmímir* ‘Treasure-Mímir’ in *Vafþrúðnismál* 45.⁵¹

Interpretation of the *gambanteinn* as essentially a sunbeam is compatible with its appearance in both *För Skírnis* and *Hárbarðsljóð*, these being the only sources in which the word appears. In the former poem the *gambanteinn* is wielded by *Skírnir*, who, as a likely hypostasis of the shining *Freyr*, himself suggests a sunbeam. His *gambanteinn* appears analogous not only to the radiant giant sword of *Beowulf* but also, to a lesser degree, to the *beadoleoma* ‘battle-light’ (1523) *Hrunting*—an

49 Originally, *gambanreiði* may have been the ‘wrath of tribute’ or ‘tribute-wrath’ which the gods would direct against *Gerðr* if she rejected *Freyr*, and *gambansumbl* a ‘feast of tribute’ or ‘tribute-feast’ hosted by *Ægir/Gymir*. Alternatively, perhaps we may understand ‘wrath (worthy) of tribute’ and ‘feast (worthy) of tribute’—in other words, ‘great wrath’ and ‘great feast’. Old English sources attest to many compounds composed of noun + noun, and the first constituent noun may be in the nominative or genitive singular, the latter seen, for example, in *sunnanleoma* ‘sunray’, *sunnanscína* ‘sunshine’ and *sunnansetlgong* ‘sunset’; see D. Kastovsky, ‘Semantics and Vocabulary’, in R. M. Hogg (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Volume I: The Beginnings to 1066* (Cambridge, 1992), 290–408 at 365–70. For a different explanation of *gambanteinn* as ‘newly budded’, see *HG*, 38, n. 50.

50 For another recent interpretation of the *gambanteinn* as a sunbeam in the underworld, see I. Nordgren, *The Well Spring of the Goths: About the Gothic Peoples in the Nordic Countries and on the Continent* (New York, 2004), 40, 43. Unfortunately, this book came to my attention too late to assess its other findings, but it is encouraging to see also that its author also identifies *Gerðr* as a ‘moon-goddess’.

51 It may be relevant that *Mímir* also appears in names for two of the Old Norse heavens: *Hreggmímir* ‘Storm-Mímir’ and *Vet(r)mímir* ‘Winter(?)—Mímir’; *PTP*, 906–9, 916–7.

explicitly *twiggy* sword, we shall find. In *Hárbarðsljóð* it was presumably the touch of the *gambanteinn* which the giant Hlébarðr had given to Óðinn that drove the donor out of his wits, conceivably due to a ‘stroke of the sun’—that is, sunstroke,⁵² common symptoms of which include confusion and disorientation. In lieu of other evidence, as suggested earlier, the name of this giant donor (otherwise unattested as a proper name) may indicate that when giving the *gambanteinn* to Óðinn he plucked it from a place of concealed ‘shelter’ (*hlé*) in his bushy ‘beard’ (*barðr*).⁵³ Additionally, the first element of this name may hint that the *gambanteinn* came from the sea, or near there, as ON *hlé*, like English ‘lee’, is principally a nautical word; it might even refer to the giant called *Hlér*, a personification of the sea.⁵⁴ In either case, Hlébarðr may actually be another alias of the sea-giant Gymir/Ægir. Such an origin could reflect the sight of the sun’s rays rising from the sea at dawn.⁵⁵

From the name *Hlébarðr* we can also deduce, with more confidence, that its bearer was specifically a *wolfish* giant, as the noun *hlébarðr* appears in a verse list of poetic terms for *vargr* ‘wolf/thief/outlaw’, where it occurs immediately after the sun-devouring wolf Fenrir.⁵⁶ This strengthens the case for Hlébarðr’s illicit or jealous (if implicitly concealed) possession of a specifically *solar* twig, which is further bolstered by the parallels of Hjálmpér’s acquisition of the radiant twig-sword Snarvendill from *Vargeisa* and Beowulf’s seizure of the radiant giant sword in the proximity of a *grundwyrgen* ‘ground/depth-wearg’.

As there are grounds for identifying the *gambanteinn* of *Hárbarðsljóð* as a solar twig in the illicit or jealous possession of a giant, something

52 See *OED* s.v. ‘sunstroke’.

53 In this regard, it is striking that an illustration in *Melsteðs Edda*, an eighteenth-century Icelandic copy of Snorri’s *Prose Edda*, shows the beard of a sword-wielding Óðinn connected by a yellow band to a pointed ray of the personified sun (see ‘Óðinn úr Melsteðs-Eddu’ (June 2002), http://www.handritinheima.is/juni2002/html/god_2.htm). Of course, Óðinn cannot be the giant Hlébarðr of *Hárbarðsljóð*, but this illustration does at least show the currency of the peculiar concept of a solar beard-hair in Iceland at a later date.

54 He also appears as *Lerus* in Saxo and as *Læ* in Danish chronicles; see H. E. Davidson and P. Fisher (ed. and trans.), *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes Books I–IX*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1979, 1980; rpt. 1996), II, 136 n. 96, 140–1 n. 127.

55 A solar aspect to the one-eyed, all-seeing Óðinn could explain his alias *Báleygr* ‘Flame-Eyed One’ in *Grímnismál* 47. See also on this potential aspect, U. Dronke (ed.), *The Poetic Edda: Volume III, Mythological Poems II* (Oxford, 2011), 62.

56 *PTP*, 902–4; see also *ibid.*, 895–7 for other meanings of *hlébarðr* (‘bear’, ‘shield’) and the observation that it is a folk-etymological reinterpretation of Latin *leopardus* ‘leopard’.

similar may be the case for that of *Fǫr Skírnis*. After all, either *gambanteinn* appears in an at least somewhat similar context involving a male god's drawing of a giantess or troll-women away from her or their usual male company; additionally, Óðinn is thought to have appropriated aspects of the mythology of Freyr, and Gerðr finds parallel in the troll-woman Ýma, who has nine sister troll-women.

If Skírnir's *gambanteinn* was similarly a solar twig, this could well be compatible with its inscription (real or threatened) with runes, especially one associated with bleeding, as we have seen the sun described in *Sólarljóð* as *setta dreyrstöfum* 'set with bloody (rune)-staves'. Furthermore, that Skírnir's twig came from a sappy branch or sapling within a *holt* 'wood' suggests that it was young and growing in strength—like a sunbeam in the early morning.

Although the location of said *holt* is uncertain, the parallels with the giantish origin of the *gambanteinn* in *Hárbarðsljóð* and of other weapons seemingly analogous to Skírnir's *gambanteinn* (*Lævateinn*, *Mistilteinn* and the giant sword) nonetheless suggest that Skírnir probably acquired it in an aquatic or semi-aquatic setting in the home of giants. Since Skírnir feels the need to tell Gerðr of his trip to the wood, the *gambanteinn* seems not to have come from Gerðr's person or immediate proximity.⁵⁷ I therefore suggest three other possibilities, though none confidently.

The first is that Skírnir took the *gambanteinn* from the beard of Gerðr's father, the giant Gymir (alias *Hlébarðr*?). Before producing the *gambanteinn*, Skírnir had said that Gerðr's father *hnígr* 'sinks' (or 'will sink') before him.

The second is that the *holt* is a wood bounding the giants' home. It might then be a wood, containing a young tree or branch of recently acquired sunlight, which fuelled the blazing 'oaken fire' around Gerðr's home.⁵⁸ If that fire was *ignis fatuus* (like that on Grendel's mere), this

57 It may be added, however, that, by overcoming Gerðr's resistance with the *gambanteinn*, Skírnir arguably liberated two twiggy solar 'branches' in the form of her lustrous arms.

58 Cf. the light of the moon shining from the branches of an oak tree in the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale *Der Mond* (examined in Chapter 14). Alternatively, given that people are often described as trees in Old Norse poetry—see M. D. J. Bintley, *Trees in the Religions of Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2015), 129–41—could it be that the wood's 'sappy tree', from which the *gambanteinn* came in *Fǫr Skírnis*,

would encourage the idea that it was fueled by branches and twigs which fell into a boggy wood akin, or identical, to *Járnviðr* 'Iron-Wood', home of the sun-crawling old giantess in *Völuspá*.⁵⁹

The third is that Skírnir refers to the *holt* of Hoddmímir mentioned in *Vafþrúðnismál* 45 as a place of concealment for two beings who will repopulate the world after Ragnarøk. This wood, we have seen, may be an alias for *Svipdagsmál*'s Mimameiðr, a name identifying the world-tree as a possession of the giant(?) Mimi/Mími. The Norse world-tree is associated with water in the form of three springs, which may originally have been one: Hvergelmir, Urðarbrunnr and Mímisbrunnr.

We can at least say with confidence that Old Norse texts would not be alone in linking the heavens and their light with a wood and its branches. As a Middle English poem we met earlier says, in the evening 'Now goes the sun under the wood'.⁶⁰ More strikingly, the concept of a heavenly wood appears in Old English literature: the *Prose Solomon and Saturn Pater Noster Dialogue* describes angels driving the Devil of *hefones holte* 'from heaven's wood', shortly before lightning attacks the Devil—with branching heavenly forks?—and *se ðunor hit ðrysced mid ðære fyrenan æcxe* 'the thunder [cf. OE *Þunor*/ON *Dórr*], it threshes/oppresses [the Devil] with the fiery axe'.⁶¹ Additionally, a Finnish variant of the myth of the fall of heavenly fire records that 'The red fire fell, one spark shot out from the golden copse, from the silver brake, from the ninth region of the air';⁶² here the golden copse sounds solar.

Archaeological support for an interpretation of the *gambanteinn* as fundamentally a sunbeam, one which the moon probably concealed in a watery underworld, comes in the form of a recent discovery in North Yorkshire. In May 2012 a sword-pommel bearing ornamentation

actually refers cryptically to Freyr himself, the fertile solar controller whom Skírnir visited before setting out for Gerðr's home?

- 59 Cf. the frosty trees by Grendel's mere and the comparable hellish water of *Blickling Homily 16* into which twigs fell (see Chapter 14).
- 60 See Chapter 13 n. 12. Cf. *MIFL*, motif 714.2 'Sun and moon placed in top of tree'; if the sun resided in the branches of a tree, this would encourage a perception of kinship between it and the mistletoe.
- 61 Anlezark, *Old English Dialogues*, 72–5. Generally on tree-lore in Anglo-Saxon literature, see D. Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2010); Bintley, *Trees*.
- 62 J. A. Abercromby, *The Pre- and Proto-Historic Finns Both Eastern and Western with the Magic Songs of the West Finns*, 2 vols (London, 1898), II, 377.

in gold foil was found, together with four gold grip-rings, a corroded lower guard and six gold rivets from the same weapon, among the artefacts comprising the Bedale hoard. The remains of the hilt match the style known to archaeologists as Petersen type L,⁶³ and they bear ornamentation in the late Anglo-Saxon Trehwiddle style. The hilt—no blade was found—has been dated to the late ninth or early tenth century.

In shape and ornamentation, the Bedale pommel finds parallel, albeit partial, in at least five other Anglo-Saxon pommels of similar date from (1) Gilling West, North Yorkshire, (2) Grønneberg, Norway, (3) Heggestrøa, Steinkje, Norway, and, less securely, (4) Dolven, Norway and (5) Fiskerton, Lincolnshire, all of which I mentioned in Chapter 4. All six may be considered members of an Anglo-Saxon stylistic group. Each features a gently upward-curving strip of ornamentation laid upon a similarly curved upper guard. This strip is surmounted in three cases (Grønneberg, Heggestrøa and Dolven) by a shorter band of ornamentation, and in all cases by two roughly vertical bars of decoration leading, on either side, towards the pommel's cap. Between these bars there is—or, on the Fiskerton and Dolven swords, there evidently once was—a circular design. On the Gilling West sword at least, this design is probably interpretable as a sun-cross; as noted earlier, the Grønneberg and Heggestrøa pommels each also have cross-like designs within a central circle.

Of these six pommels, the one from Bedale stands out. That it bears ornamentation in gold makes it unusual among pommels in the archaeological record of this period; the other related pommels, for example, have silver decoration. But it is the imagery on the Bedale pommel, which is more detailed than that on the other five pommels (at least as they survive), that is of chief interest here. To my knowledge, this imagery has yet to be explained in detail. I therefore offer the following interpretation, based largely on examination of photographs such as Figure 5, of the better-preserved side of the pommel, and my foregoing analysis of myths about conflict between the sun and moon:⁶⁴

63 J. Petersen, *De norske vikingesverd: en typologisk-kronologisk studie over vikingetidens vaaben* (Kristiania, 1919), 112–6.

64 Since future study of the Bedale hilt might one day reveal further imagery on the poorly preserved lower guard, and on the side of the pommel from which most ornamentation has been lost (although it appears likely to have been essentially identical to that shown in Figure 5), I offer this interpretation provisionally. For more

- (a) Towards the top of what survives of the pommel, at both the left and right edges, a golden crescent probably represents the moon.⁶⁵ (The Grønneberg pommel has one similar crescent, albeit in silver, on the left, its right-hand crescent having presumably been lost. In their surviving forms, none of the other pommels bear such crescents.)
- (b) Slightly further in, again on either side, the top of another crescent may represent the moon rising or descending. (The Grønneberg and Dolven pommels have similar partial crescents in silver.)
- (c) The large, gently upward-curving arc from which the crescent moon rises, or to which it descends, could represent a lunar or solar barque.⁶⁶ Possibly both types of ship are suggested at once. The barque is adorned with an interlace motif potentially suggestive of the curled dragon(s) discussed below.
- (d) Above the barque, in the centre, the large, medallion-like golden circle presumably represents either a full moon or, more likely, the sun.

about the hilt, see B. M. Ager, 'Hoard [Unique ID: YORYM-CEE620]', in *Portable Antiquities Scheme* (26 September 2012), '<https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/504460>'; S. Brunning, 'From Poetry to Reality: The Gold-Trimmed Sword Hilt in the Bedale Hoard', online video recording, Facebook, 21 February 2018, '<https://www.facebook.com/LakesideArts/videos/10156114298068427>'; S. Brunning, 'The Mythbusting Sword from the Bedale Hoard' (15 February 2018), '<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/eastmidlandsvikings/2018/02/15/mythbusting-sword-bedale-hoard>'; 'The Beauty of the Bedale Hoard Revealed' (13 December 2014), '<https://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/news-media/latest-news/the-beauty-of-the-bedale-hoard-revealed>'; 'The Bedale Hoard', '<https://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/collections/collections-highlights/the-bedale-hoard>'; 'Bedale Hoard', in *Wikipedia* (26 July 2019), 'https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bedale_Hoard'. Brunning, *Sword*, 142–3 observes: 'The hilt from the mere in *Beowulf*, which became a royal trophy, finds archaeological echoes within the Staffordshire and Bedale hoards, combining to offer the strongest evocation that hilts possessed value (material and symbolic) independently of blades.'

65 Admittedly, this would be clearer if these crescents were silver, but since the moon not uncommonly appears yellow and takes the sun's light, a yellow moon is not surprising. The moon is also yellow on the Bronze Age sky disk from Nebra, Germany, for instance; Meller, *Der geschmiedete Himmel*, 22–31; the same disk bears at its base a yellow curve which may well represent a solar barque.

66 For scholarship on the solar barque in northern Europe, see Chapter 12 n. 22.

- (e) Surrounding the sun-circle is a detail wholly absent from the other pommels: a curled dragon, almost an ouroboros. It has two upward-curling legs at the top, between which is an upward-pointing tail. Its head, with open eye and mouth, points downwards to touch the top of the large arc and approach the end of its tail. I identify this golden creature as a lunar snake which has surrounded the sun, whether by night when the sun sinks below the horizon or by day during a solar eclipse; possibly the snake's encircling body reflects the corona visible during an annular solar eclipse. We may recall the similar significance of the wolf-snake on the Gosforth Cross.
- (f) Standing on the barque, on either side of the dragon, two vertical gold bands, each also containing foliate interlace, represent the walls of an enclosure on the barque. (On other swords in the group, the enclosure's roof could be represented by additional ornamentation on the pommel's cap.)
- (g) Within the sun-circle is another unique feature. Although not immediately easy to identify, close examination reveals the greatly elongated body of a creature. Its head, with pointed snout, prominent right eye, triangular ear and open lower jaw, is visible on the left about halfway up. Its neck curls around part of the bottom half of the circle, and leads to a long body, two sinuous legs and a tail which curl around themselves to fill the rest of the circle.⁶⁷ If the circle does represent the sun, this beast might be a solar creature. More likely, though, it is the lunar snake again; its slender, curling body, two legs and tail invite identification with the surrounding dragon. Here we may see it curled jealously around its golden solar prize within a walled enclosure—like, I suggest, the *niðdraca* around its golden hoard in *Beowulf*; we might also compare the enclosures to which, we have seen, other lunar thieves took, or intended to take, stolen sunshine.⁶⁸ (On the

67 I am indebted here to the analysis in Brunning, 'From Poetry to Reality'.

68 It may be noteworthy that the dragon outside the circle extends up both sides of the enclosure. Immediately before introducing 'the old one' and her lunar pitchforker, *Völuspá* places *Niðhoggr* in a hall far from the sun on *Náströnd* 'Corpse-Shore',

Grønneberg, Heggstrøa and Dolven pommels the additional shorter horizontal strip of ornamentation on the barque might suggest a plinth on which to display the solar circle.)

- (h) Below the barque, on the sword's upper guard, horizontal pairs of half-crescents (some now missing) represent the dead moon; they also find no parallel on the other swords (at least as preserved). This imagery is in keeping with the concept of the lunar wane as dismemberment, and of the action of the probably solar sword *Angrvaðill* 'Grief-Wane' (see Chapter 14). It may also call to mind the fate of the *niðdraca*, which Beowulf *forwrat ... on middan* 'cut through ... in the middle' (2705). Furthermore, since the barque above is presumably afloat, the dead moon apparently resides in water below—as it does in *The Dead Moon*, as do Grendel and his mother, and as does the bisected *niðdraca* after its corpse is shoved off a cliff into the sea's embrace (*Beowulf* 3131–3).
- (i) A golden lozenge between the half-crescents—another feature absent from the other pommels—may represent submerged sunlight acquired by the dead moon and liberated from it when, I infer, it was bisected by a solar warrior. We may recall the light that shone in the monster's underwater home when Beowulf beheaded Grendel's mother. (Originally, there was probably another such lozenge on the left of the pommel.)
- (j) A leafy golden twig or branch on either side of the bottom of the pommel—again unparalleled on the other swords—represents, I suggest, an Old English **gambantan*, the inspiration for, or equivalent of, the *gambanteinn*. Its positioning beneath the barque again suggests submergence. Furthermore, that this twig would be largely hidden from view when the sword was upright with pommel uppermost, but next to the wielder's hand when the weapon was drawn and raised for

which was presumably by a sea; this hall was entwined with the spines of snakes, and drops of venom fell into it through the roof-vent (37–8). These details raise the possibility that on the Bedale pommel we might see (what doubles as?) a lunar dragon's enclosure; such a venomous rain might explain the fragmentary golden streams(?)—unparalleled on the other pommels—seen on either side of the dragon's legs. Additionally, it may be relevant that the *niðdraca* of *Beowulf* also inhabited a walled enclosure by the sea.

use, strengthens the case for the *gambanteinn's* concealment by a lunar giant or giants, before being seized and recovered by a solar warrior. Its presence also gives materiality to the concept of the twig-sword, of which the Bedale sword may be considered a prime archaeological manifestation.



Figure 5. Sword-Pommel from the Bedale Hoard.

Image courtesy of York Museums Trust, <http://yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk>,
CC BY-SA 4.0.

Support for a celestial interpretation of some aspects of the imagery on the Bedale pommel and its relatives comes firstly from parallels in Gotlandic art thought to date from the early fifth to the early seventh century AD; secondly from a medieval Norwegian candleholder; and thirdly from a far earlier and more distant source.

Certain Gotland picture-stones display similar scenes which may well have solar significance (they lack crescent moons, however).⁶⁹ A stone from Bro church, for example, shows a slender, gently curved, oared ship with central, rectangular enclosure beneath two circles containing swirl-ornamentation (perhaps the sun and moon, or shields), beneath a much larger, swirl-circle with forked appendages around its circumference (probably the sun). Around the scene is a painted border which incorporates at its top, immediately above the 'sun', a bar of

⁶⁹ For discussion, see André, *Tracing*, 117–66.

plant-like ornamentation (perhaps heaven's wood).⁷⁰ A second stone, from Sanda church, shows the same elements but with notable additions: half-way up the stone is a horizontal line (presumably representing the ground), on which stands a tree (perhaps the world-tree), above which (in its branches?) are the two smaller circles, which are each completely surrounded by opposing snakes; below the ground is the front half of a horse(?) with gaping mouth, which is above the (manned) ship.⁷¹ A third stone, from Hangvar parish, shows a boat immediately beneath a large swirl-circle containing a cross (probably a sun-cross), which is immediately below an alarming centipede-like dragon with gaping mouth, into which a figure (perhaps Týr) may be placing one hand.⁷² A fourth stone, from Martebo church, shows a similar scene with a similar monster, but without the man.⁷³

A medieval iron candleholder from Dale Church in Sogn, Norway takes the form of a model of a viking longship. It has three vertical iron spikes in the centre to hold candles, and there are two vexilla, one at the prow and one at the stern. Each vexillum bears a white crescent moon on a red background and is surmounted by a beast's white head, which appears to have two faces. The designs on the vexilla may be heraldic, but I suggest that the whole model represents, or at least strongly reflects, the concept of a lunar barque.⁷⁴

The far earlier and more distant parallel comes from ancient Egypt. In the *Book of Gates* the sun-god Ra, enemy of the snake Apep, is pictured travelling by night through the underworld in a slender, gently curved barque. He stands in the middle of the boat within a central enclosure which is surrounded by a snake. There are no crescent moons, however.⁷⁵

70 Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, I, fig. 11, II, 29, fig. 319 (Bro I); Nylén and Lamm, *Stones*, 23.

71 Nylén and Lamm, *Stones*, 29 (Sanda church and churchyard (IV)).

72 Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, I, fig. 27, II, 69, figs. 403–4 (Austers (I); Nylén and Lamm, *Stones*, 31.

73 Nylén and Lamm, *Stones*, 34–5.

74 For photographs and discussion of this object, see R. Hauglid, *Norway: A Thousand Years of Native Arts and Crafts* (Oslo, 1959), 6 (calls it an 'iron lightship') and pl. 14; J. H. Munksgaard, 'Metal Vexilla on Viking Ships', in J. O. Engene (ed.), *Proceedings of the XX International Congress on Vexillology, Stockholm, 27th July to 1st August 2003* (Bergen, 2004), 465–79.

75 See J. Hill, 'Book of Gates' (2010), <https://ancientegyptonline.co.uk/bookgates> and <https://www.ancient.eu/image/4543/ra-travelling-through-the-underworld>. Freyja's Brisingamen has also been traced, via the Roman manifestation of the goddess Isis, to an ancient Egyptian source, namely the Menet necklace of the

Some imagination is required to fill the gaps, but I propose that the Bedale pommel's imagery, read from top to bottom, reflects an Anglo-Saxon myth in which the sun, while journeying by night or day, possibly in its barque, was captured by a lunar snake, which coiled itself around its prey. The snake then perhaps swallowed the sun or at least some of its light, which it regurgitated for the submerged dark moon. Subsequently, however, the sun or a solar champion visited the underwater moon and bisected it with a solar twig-sword, which he perhaps recovered from the moon's proximity. In doing so he freed the stolen sunlight, so that, after a period of darkness, the sun could shine again, as when the shining blade of a sword is drawn from its scabbard.

If this interpretation of the Bedale pommel is broadly correct, this artefact illustrates essential aspects of the basic celestial myth that lies behind texts such as *Riddle 29*, *Wið dweorh* and, I believe, *Beowulf*. The other, less ornate pommels probably also have a celestial significance, though presumably not quite the same one, as they lack major details such as the dragon, the bisected moon and the golden branch. Nevertheless, since all six Anglo-Saxon pommels were found either in parts of northern England settled by Norsemen or in Norway, they raise the possibility of the transfer of celestial imagery, and concomitantly celestial myth, from Anglo-Saxon England to the viking world, and/or vice versa. As such, the Bedale pommel renders plausible—though scarcely proves—the transfer into Norse mythology of an Anglo-Saxon myth involving a submerged solar twig, a **gambantan*, which became known to Norsemen as the *gambanteinn* and which acquired close relatives in the submerged swords *Mistilteinn* and *Lævateinn*.⁷⁶

An explanation of the *gambanteinn* as, originally at least, a twig of solar tribute may also help to explain both the sword-name *Hrunting* in *Beowulf* and *Hrunting*'s relationship to the giant sword with which the *gambanteinn* appears more closely equivalent. For although the etymology of *Hrunting* is uncertain, it may be interpretable as 'Descendant (-ing) of a **hrunt*', the hypothesized word being, as Kemp

cow-goddess Hathor; see B. Arrhenius, 'Brisingamen and the Menet Necklace', in U. von Freeden, H. Friesinger and E. Wamers (ed.), *Glaube, Kult und Herrschaft: Phänomene des Religiösen im 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr. in Mittel- und Nordeuropa* (Bonn, 2009), 219–30.

76 If *Lævateinn* is the 'Twig of Treacheries', this may be because, as a sunbeam-sword, it is repeatedly stolen by the treacherous moon.

Malone argued, the Old English ancestor of modern English 'runt', the initial 'h' being lost in the transition to Middle English.⁷⁷ According to the *OED*, 'runt' is first recorded in the early sixteenth century in the sense 'old decayed stump of a tree', but Malone also notes the cognate Danish *runte* 'pole' and expresses confidence that 'modern English runt can be traced back to OE times'.⁷⁸ I suggest that the name Hrunting identifies this sword—crucially described as *se beadoleoma* at the very moment it fails to injure Grendel's mother—with a small or decayed stump, branch or twig (scion), symbolic of a weakly radiant sunbeam just before sunrise.⁷⁹

Hrunting was certainly a twig-sword of some sort.⁸⁰ Its most distinctive feature was an *ecg* 'edge' or 'blade' *atertanum fah* 'shining/stained/hostile with poison-twigs' (1459). This description appears, like many others in *Beowulf*, usefully ambiguous.⁸¹ Possibly, *atertan* 'poison-twig' is an otherwise unattested kenning for 'snake', the phrase describing the curling, snake-like patterns on a pattern-welded blade, or maybe steel rims welded to the sword's core (*eggteinar* 'edge-twigs' in Old Norse).⁸² Alternatively or additionally, *atertan* might allude to the use of poison in the forging process, especially as the edge of Snarvendill/Hrotti was 'hardened in the poison of snakes'.⁸³ Then again, I suggest this description might indicate that Hrunting's *ecg* had a

77 See K. Malone, 'On the Etymology of Runt', *Language* 20 (1944), 87–8; cf. OE *hrung* > ME *roung* > modern English 'rung'. This derivation is admitted as a possibility by Liberman, 'Beowulf — Grettir', 390. Note also Nicholson, 'Point', 57: 'Hrunting (a runt?)'. Alternatively, OE *Hrunting* and ON *Hrotti* might relate to OE *hrindan* 'to push, thrust' and ON *hrinda* 'push, kick, throw'; *PTP*, 790.

78 Malone, 'On the Etymology', 88. Similarly, for Brady, "'Weapons'", 98, 'the first element of Hrunting's name means "long piece of wood"'. *SASE* 5-7, 313, states that *Hrunting* "may be a derivative of **hrung* 'pole, staff' (our word 'rung')."

79 Cf. ON *stífr* 'stump' as a poetic term for 'sword'; *PTP*, 791–2. It is not wholly inconceivable that, in *Beowulf*, the name *Hrunting* puns on the sense 'old, decayed stump/branch of Ing (*hrunt-Ing*)'.

80 Cf. Horowitz, 'Sword Imagery', 142–3; see also Lehmann, 'Atertanum Fah', 227–9 on wood-based swords.

81 For an overview of interpretations of this unique term, see *KB*, 205; Lehmann, 'Atertanum Fah', 230, for example, suggests that it may mean 'of gleaming/fiery hilt/pommel'.

82 For *eggteinar*, see *PTP*, 808–9. Note the description of the blood-stained snake along the edge of the Sigarshólmr sword in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (see Chapter 13). Additionally, Tyrfingr had poisoned edges; Tolkien, *Saga*, 19.

83 See Chapter 3. So too was Tyrfingr; see Tolkien, *Saga*, 8. *SASE*, 132 refers to the use of acid (= poison?) in the making of swords.

twig-like, pattern-welded design which was identified with poisonous shoots, such as those of mistletoe. Foliate ornamentation adorns some surviving Anglo-Saxon sword-hilts,⁸⁴ and some sheaths show foliate or somewhat twig-like designs,⁸⁵ though whether any blades bore such decoration is unknown as so many of them are severely corroded. Some earlier Celtic wooden scabbards display representations of mistletoe leaves, which might, judging from the testimony of Pliny (see Chapter 8), have had lunar associations.⁸⁶

Other evidence indicating that Hrunting was a twig-sword, albeit in a different respect, might survive in *Grettis saga's* account of the hero's fight with the giant Gangr. As a *hæftmece* 'hafted sword' (1457), Hrunting appears to correspond, albeit problematically, to the weapon described in the saga, rather puzzlingly, as both a *fleinn* 'bayonet-like pike' and a *heptisax* 'hafted sax'.⁸⁷ It was with this weapon that the giant vainly tried to strike Grettir before, again unsuccessfully, reaching for a wall-hung sword corresponding to *Beowulf's* giant sword.⁸⁸ This *heptisax* had a *tréskapt* 'tree/wooden-shaft' as its handle, which broke apart when Grettir parried its blow with his sax.⁸⁹ It may be, however, that the description of the *fleinn*-weapon as a *heptisax* is simply mistaken.

84 E.g., D. M. Wilson, 'Some Neglected Late Anglo-Saxon Swords', *Medieval Archaeology* 9 (1965), 32–54, nos. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12; R. Underwood, *Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare* (Stroud, 1999), pl. 8.

85 See E. A. Cameron, *Sheaths and Scabbards in England AD400–1100* (Oxford, 2000), 105 (no. 145), 208 (fig. 51); 105 (no. 147), 212 (fig. 55).

86 R. Pleiner, *The Celtic Sword* (Oxford, 1993), 67–8. The legendary Norse hero Þoðvarr Bjarki, an analogue to Beowulf, wielded a sword called *Laufi* (Latin *Loui* in *GD*, I, 118–9), a name probably derived from ON *lauf* 'leaf' either because it bore foliate ornamentation or had a leaf-shaped blade; see Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 54; *PTP*, 791–2. In *Völsunga saga*, Óðinn drives an exceptional sword up to the hilt into a huge flowering apple-tree—one of the commonest hosts of mistletoe—called the *Barnstokkr* 'Child-Trunk' in the hall of King Völsungr, and only the king's son Sigmundur (= Sigemund in *Beowulf*) could withdraw it (Finch, *Saga*, 4–5). This may be a variant or relative of a myth which appears in *Svipdagsmál*, namely that of the taking of the (mistletoe?) twig-sword from the world-tree; furthermore, the name *Barnstokkr* raises the possibility of a link with the mistletoe's piercing of Baldr, Óðinn's barn 'child' (*Völuspá* 31).

87 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 215.

88 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 215. For an argument that the *heptisax* was originally wielded by Grettir, as Hrunting was by Beowulf, and described as the *bjartr gunnlogi*, see Jorgensen, 'Grendel, Grettir'.

89 Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 215.

If Hrunting was adorned with representations of mistletoe specifically, it would presumably be close kin to the Old Norse sword Mistilteinn, a name which confirms an Old Norse concept of a mistletoe-sword. That sword, in turn, was probably a double or close relative both of the weapon called Lævateinn which Loki plucked from a tree, and the *gambanteinn* which Skírnir took from a sappy tree and used to overcome Gerðr, apparently after giving up on the self-animated sword given to him by Freyr.⁹⁰ That ‘failed’ sword of Freyr, in turn, corresponds to Hrunting both descriptively (as Freyr’s weapon is *málfán*, so Hrunting is *wundenmæl* ‘wound with signs’ or ‘adorned with winding signs’, 1531) and functionally, since both weapons fail to overcome a giantess with likely lunar associations.⁹¹

I suggest that an explanation for this confusing web of relationships is that Hrunting was of fundamentally the same kind as Mistilteinn, and as the sword which Freyr gave to Skírnir, and as the *gambanteinn*. Given especially the apparent functional correspondence between Mistilteinn in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* and both Hrunting and the giant sword, Hrunting also seems closely related to the giant sword.⁹² However, just as Freyr’s sword was apparently weaker than the *gambanteinn*, so Hrunting was weaker than the giant sword, and therefore implicitly less radiant. Since Hrunting was too weak to overcome the moon-giantess (Grendel’s mother), it failed where the giant sword later succeeded at

90 It is difficult to say whether, or how, any of these weapons might relate to the mistletoe-like *aureus ramus* ‘golden bough’, which Aeneas had to pluck and bring to the underworld goddess Proserpine, according to Virgil’s *Aeneid* (6.131–211); H. R. Fairclough (trans.), *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I–VI*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999), 542–7. For discussion of this bough, see J. Z. Smith, ‘When the Bough Breaks’, *History of Religions* 12 (1973), 342–71. Also unclear is whether there is any distant connection with a model tree or branch with wooden stem and gilded bronze leaves from a pre-Roman Iron Age site at Manching in Bavaria, or with metallic leaves from other European sites; for these, see M. Aldhouse-Green, *Seeing the Wood for the Trees: The Symbolism of Trees and Wood in Ancient Gaul and Britain* (Aberystwyth, 2000), 11.

91 Cf. Lehmann, ‘Atertanum Fah’, 227–8. Freyr’s ‘failed’ sword might also be connected with mistletoe because it was *mjóvan* ‘slender’ (*För Skírnis* 23, 25), rather than the mistletoe-weapon that slew Baldr was *mjór* and *mær* ‘slender’ (*Völuspá* 31, 32).

92 Cf. Jorgensen, ‘Gift’, 89 for the view that the epithet *hæfimece* has ‘very likely’ been transferred to Hrunting from the sword in the cave. Additionally, Horowitz, ‘Sword Imagery’, 136 observes that ‘Everything about Hrunting seems to anticipate in small some characteristic ... the giant sword’, and proceeds to compare and contrast them.

the hottest time of day, at or around *non dæges* 'the ninth hour of the day' (1600), about 3 p.m. The giant sword is described in similar terms to Hrunting—each, for instance, is a *hildebil* and *hringmæl* 'ring-marked/ adorned' (1521, 1564). Also, the giant sword's victorious melting on account of *heafoswat* 'battle-sweat, blood' (1606, 1668) after beheading Grendel's mother implicitly serves as an inverse complement to Hrunting's hardening in *heafoswat* (1460) before failing to achieve the same feat. The giant sword was undoubtedly larger than Hrunting, which suggests a greater potential radiance—a potential probably realized when it beheaded Grendel's mother. In doing so, the giant sword superseded Hrunting, became what Hrunting formerly was: *an foran ealdgestreona* 'unique before (all other) ancient-treasures' (1458).

Other evidence also points to convergence between Hrunting and the giant sword:⁹³

- (a) Both are in some sense *captive* swords whose hilts are emphasized. The giant sword is the likely subject of a theft, after which it was *hung* on the wall of the giants' concealed lair and apparently never used; it also appears closely linked to the light and heat probably contained *within* the body of Grendel's mother. Furthermore, it is reduced to its hilt after its blade melts. Comparably, Hrunting is a *hæftmece* (1457), a unique compound translatable as both 'hilt(ed)-sword' and 'captive/imprisoned sword'.
- (b) That Hrunting does not break when Beowulf uses it is testimony to its mighty strength, even if it cannot match that of the giant sword. Its worth is emphasized (1458–64). Beowulf's successive blows with Hrunting and the giant sword may be compared with his successive blows with a *single* excellent sword, Nægling, against the dragon. Nægling initially fails to penetrate its target (compare Hrunting) and then shatters when it strikes the dragon a second time (compare the destruction of the giant sword's blade, albeit by a wholly different process).⁹⁴

93 Cf. Gould, 'Beowulf and Folktale Morphology' on the poet's supposed splitting of the Proppian donor-function between Unferð (with Hrunting) and God (with the giant sword).

94 Cf. T. Culbert, 'The Narrative Functions of Beowulf's Swords', *JEGP* 59 (1960), 13–20 at 16–20.

(c) After Unferð has loaned Hrunting to Beowulf, the Geat reciprocates by instructing Hroðgar to give Unferð *ealde lafe, / wrætlic wægsweord* '(my) old leaving, (my) marked wave-sword' (1488–9). The term *wægsweord* is found only here and is significant not only for its likely description of the wavy markings on a pattern-welded blade,⁹⁵ which would make the sword a suitable replacement for Hrunting should Beowulf be unable to return the loaned weapon. It also hints, both retrospectively and proleptically, at an equivalence with other swords wielded by Beowulf. Thus, it refers back to the sword with which Beowulf slew the *meredeor* 'mere-beast' (558) at the bottom of a turbulent sea after being separated by waves from *Breca* 'Breaker, Wave'; indeed, it could be the very same sword. That sword, we have seen, foreshadows the giant sword which killed Grendel's mother.⁹⁶ The term *wægsweord* also anticipates both the giant sword and Hrunting in that Beowulf returns with both weapons from the waves; it might even prefigure the giant sword hung on a *wag* 'wall' (1662) (compare *wæg* 'wave') in a subtle pun.⁹⁷ It appears, then, that the single 'wave-sword' has a degree of identity with both Hrunting and the giant sword, and that the two swords brought from Grendel's mere are thereby drawn into closer connection.⁹⁸

95 Cf. *SASE5-7*, 113–4. Note also ON *vægir* 'wavy one' and *vægileiptr* 'wavy lightning', poetic terms for 'sword'; *PTP*, p. 796.

96 One might infer from *mecum ... sweo[r]dum* 'with swords ... with swords' (565, 567) that Beowulf wielded more than one sword during this episode (cf. Hrunting and the giant sword). *KB*, 153, however, sees 'a "generic plural," used for the logically correct sg., perhaps even hardened into a kind of epic formula'.

97 Note also that the weapon with which Beowulf cut the dragon in two was a *wællseax* 'battle/slaughter-knife/short sword' (2703)—does this unique word subtly pun on 'wall-sword' (*wæll/wæll* 'wall')?

98 Note also Brimir, the *æztr* ... *sverða* 'best/noblest/most powerful of swords', according to the version of *Grímnismál* 44 found in the manuscript AM 748 I 4^{to}; also Brimir, the sword Óðinn once had with him when standing *á bjargi* 'on a cliff/rock/mountain', according to the Eddic poem *Sigrdrífumál* 'Sayings of Sigrdrífa' (14). *Brimir*, which is also a poetic term for 'sword' and the name of a giant (probably an alias of Ymir, from whose blood the sea was made), might be based on ON *brim* 'surf', which would suggest that the sword was closely associated with the sea and perhaps with an ancient giant. Another possible derivation, though, is from ON *brimi/brími* 'burning, fire'; *PTP*, 798–9. Perhaps the name is purposefully ambiguous to denote a fiery sword from the sea.

- (d) In *Grettis saga*, it is the *heptisax*—corresponding (albeit problematically) to *Hrunting*—which broke at the handle, not the sword hanging on the giant’s wall which corresponds more immediately to the giant sword. Furthermore, it may have been a piece of the broken wooden handle of the *heptisax* on which *Grettir* carved runes describing the giant’s defeat, a rune-stick on which he also recorded his extraction of human bones from the giant’s lair. He left this stick and the bagged bones in the local church’s porch, where they were read by the priest who had earlier left him for dead.⁹⁹ If so, there is a parallel with *Beowulf*’s taking of the rune-inscribed hilt of the giant sword, symbolic of the resurrective Cross, to *Heorot*, where it is regarded by the pious, fatherly *Hroðgar*, after the hero had been abandoned by the men who had watched for his return at the surface of the mere. In other words, upon close examination, the *Hrunting*-equivalent of *Grettis saga* may have a good deal in common with *Beowulf*’s giant sword.
- (e) In *Hjálmþés rímur* the name *Hrotti*, the likely Old Norse equivalent of *Hrunting*, is an alias of *Snarvendill*, the sword which chiefly parallels *Beowulf*’s giant sword.

These points of convergence raise the distinct possibility that *Hrunting* and the giant sword are (or were formerly) consubstantial. If so, the giant sword would essentially be a brighter, more powerful version of *Hrunting*. This could explain *Beowulf*’s descriptions of the giant sword as *eacen* ‘increased’ (1663) and as having *eacnum ecgum* ‘increased edges’ (2140)—it would command more sunlight, more solar power than *Hrunting*.¹⁰⁰ If so, *Hrunting* and the giant sword are (or were originally) different not in kind but degree.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga*, 216–7. Cf. Swanton, *Beowulf*, 198.

¹⁰⁰ Note also the *eacne eardas* ‘increased homes/tracts’ of the cleansed mere (1621), and that, fittingly, *Beowulf* was introduced as *eacen* (198). If the fire-dragon is interpretable on one level as a dimly shining creature of the waning or dark moon, one which hoards a treasure symbolic of sunlight, then that treasure’s description as *eacencræftig*, literally ‘increased in strength’ (3051), within *hordærna sum /eacencræftig* ‘a certain strength-increased hoard-house’ (2279–80), may also be noted.

¹⁰¹ From another perspective, the weapons perhaps also differ in rectitude, for whereas the giant sword was evidently bestowed on *Beowulf* by God as an instrument of divine justice, *Hrunting* was loaned to him by a fratricide. That said, the poet

If, in this study, I have found possible answers to some of the puzzles posed by the giant sword and Hrunting, no doubt many others remain unrecognized and unanswered. To some extent this is inevitable, given the wide variety, complexity and obscurity of many of the sources and source relationships, and the severely fragmented and dispersed nature of the surviving material. I think, with some diffidence, that this material somewhat resembles a jumble of worn and distorted pieces from complementary jigsaws, certain parts of which have been lost and others more or less accurately repaired or replaced by more or less adequate substitutes. The risks inherent in interpreting such material are many, some of which I have doubtless fallen victim to. Principal among them is the tendency toward ‘confirmation bias’, which renders the investigator more likely to perceive, and attribute significance to, similarities than differences in an endeavour to bring order to what may, in reality, sometimes simply be ‘unpatterned unrelated bric-a-brac’.¹⁰² Consequently, although I believe I have clarified and demonstrated the coherence in terms of celestial myth of many curious details in *Beowulf* and its analogues, I make no claim to present a complete, fully consistent or perfectly interpreted picture. But then, it seems most unlikely that the many traditions analyzed in this book were ever wholly consistent in their details, even if they share common themes.

However tentatively I present the findings in this book, I do hope to have made a persuasive overall case for the giant sword of *Beowulf* and Hrunting as having once been, from a Germanic perspective, kindred possessions of Ing/Yngvi-Freyr or at least of his circle. In turn, I hope to have demonstrated their symbolic roles in an underlying myth about an elemental struggle between the sun (represented by Ing, Hroðgar and Beowulf) and the moon (represented by Grendel, his mother and possibly the climactic dragon) for the possession of sunlight, one manifest in variant forms in other Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts. In *Beowulf* this myth is not, I emphasize, explicit—it serves as a back-story, an enriching native underpinning to the primary narrative and to the poet’s subtle Christian imagery. But its presence, which may have been far more apparent to Anglo-Saxons than it is

has nothing but praise for Hrunting in 1455–64, and still calls it a *deorum madme* ‘precious treasure’ (1527) when it fails; nor did Beowulf disparage it (1809–12).

102 Fell, ‘Paganism in *Beowulf*’, 10.

today, nevertheless underlines the truth of one eminent scholar's claim that the story of *Beowulf* is 'far more mythical and fantastic than has been thought'.¹⁰³

That confirmatory finding might alone justify the undertaking of this study. But I would go further, given that the image of the giant sword's waning seems to intimate a melting candle (perhaps even the Paschal Candle), the Cross and more generally—if the poet implicitly identifies the dwindling blade as a *lænan gesceaft* 'loaned creation' (1622)—the transient nature of the whole of God's created world. This structurally central image represents, I suggest, nothing less than the spiritual and thematic heart of *Beowulf*, and encapsulates what seems to me to be its essential message. I propose, in conclusion, that the key to understanding this message lies in the early Christian metaphorical significance of ice and its melting by fiery heat.

Roughly half a century ago, Thomas D. Hill examined the figurative meaning of images of heat and cold, fire and ice in Old English poetry against the background of the Christian writings of patristic authors.¹⁰⁴ He observed that Anglo-Saxon and other medieval literatures display a 'pattern of imagery in which heat and cold can express moral significance—the fiery hot love of perfect charity, and the icy cold of unrepentant sinfulness.'¹⁰⁵ This pattern derives ultimately from Biblical statements such as *Matthew 24:12 et quoniam abundabit iniquitas refrigescet caritas multorum* 'and because iniquity will abound, the charity of many will cool'; *Ecclesiasticus 3:17 sicut in sereno glacies solventur tua peccata* 'your sins shall melt away just like ice in fair weather'; and *Jeremiah 6:7 sicut frigidam facit cisterna aquam suam sic frigidam fecit malitiam suam* 'As a cistern makes its water cold, so has she made her wickedness cold'.¹⁰⁶ As Hill also observes: 'The figurative conception that heat represents charity and cold its opposite, is a very widely used metaphor throughout patristic and early medieval

103 J. D. Niles, *Beowulf and Lejre* (Tempe, 2007), 225. It also suggests that, despite two centuries of scholarly scrutiny, *Beowulf* is not 'mined out', that it still contains hidden treasures which traditional philological and comparative approaches to early texts can reveal, if not in full detail, then at least in outline; cf. Drout *et al.*, *Beowulf Unlocked*, 1.

104 T. D. Hill, 'The Tropological Context of Heat and Cold Imagery in Anglo-Saxon Poetry', *NM* 69 (1968), 522–32.

105 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 523.

106 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 523.

exegetical and homiletic works';¹⁰⁷ this includes Old English and Old Norse texts.¹⁰⁸

Hill cites instances from the writings of Pope Gregory, who 'discusses conversion [i.e., to Christianity] in terms of the ice of wickedness being melted',¹⁰⁹ Augustine of Hippo and others. I shall quote two instances.

In describing pre-Christian Britain, the sixth-century British monk Gildas wrote:

Interea glaciali frigore rigenti insulae et velut longiore terrarum secessu soli visibili non proxima verus ille non de firmamento solum temporali sed de summa etiam caelorum arce tempora cuncta excedente universo orbi praeifulgidum sui coruscum ostendens, tempore, ut scimus, summo Tiberii Caesaris, quo absque ullo impedimento eius propagabatur religio, comminata senatu nolente a principe morte delatoribus militum eiusdem, radios suos primum indulget, id est sua praecepta, Christus.

Meanwhile, to an island [i.e., Britain] numb with chill ice and far removed, as in a remote nook of the world, from the visible sun, Christ made a present of his rays (that is, his precepts), Christ the true sun, which shows its dazzling brilliance to the entire earth, not from the temporal firmament merely, but from the highest citadel of heaven, that goes beyond all time. This happened first, as we know, in the last years of the emperor Tiberius, at a time when Christ's religion was being propagated without hindrance: for against the wishes of the senate, the emperor threatened the death penalty for informers against soldiers of God.¹¹⁰

In a sermon for the Easter vigil, Gaudentius of Brescia (died 410) wrote:¹¹¹

Opportuno tempore Dominus Jesus beatissimam festivitatem Paschae voluit celebrari, post autumnum nebulam, post horrorem hiemis, ante aestatis

107 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 523.

108 See Hill, 'Tropological Context', 527–32; D. M. McDougall, 'Studies in the Prose Style of the Old Icelandic and Old Norwegian Homily Books' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 1983), II, 401–2. Note also the imagery in a passage from the fourteenth-century Middle English poem *Piers Plowman* by William Langland (B-text, passus 17, lines 223–30), cited by Hill, 'Tropological Context', 532 n. 2.

109 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 524.

110 Text and translation from M. Winterbottom (ed. and trans.), *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works* (London, 1978), 18, 91; passage noted by Hill, 'Tropological Context', 529 n. 2.

111 Gaudentius was one of many patristic authors whose work was known in Anglo-Saxon England; see M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), 303.

ardorem. Oportebat enim Solem Justitiae Christum, et Judaeorum caliginem, et rigorem Gentilium, ante ardorem futuri iudicii, placido Resurrectionis suae lumine dimovere, cunctaque in statum tranquillitatis primordii revocare, quae fuerant velamine tetro confusa ab illo principe tenebrarum. Nam veris tempore Deus condidit mundum.

The Lord Jesus wished the most blessed feast of the Pasch to be celebrated at an appropriate time, after the cloud of autumn, after the horror of winter, but before the heat of summer. For it was right that Christ, the Sun of Justice, should remove both the Jews' mist and the ice of the pagans, before the heat of the future judgment, by the peaceful light of his own Resurrection; should recall to the state of primitive tranquillity all things which had been thrown into confusion by a foul disguise from that prince of darkness. For in springtime God made the world.¹¹²

Hill proposes 'a possibility, although it is no more than that' that the simile of the giant sword melting just like ice when God the Father loosens the bonds of frost 'may allude to the conception of the ice of evil being melted away'.¹¹³ He adds: 'Conclusive proof for this suggestion would obviously have to depend on an interpretation of the fight with Grendel's mother as a whole; but since the simile is one of the most clear-cut Christian references in the poem, and occurs precisely at that moment when the forces of evil have been overcome, the possibility is at least worth considering.'¹¹⁴

Conclusive proof of the validity of *any* interpretation of *Beowulf*—a poem that 'resists our intelligence quite successfully'¹¹⁵—is rarely, if ever, forthcoming,¹¹⁶ which is perhaps why Hill's perceptive suggestion seems to have been neglected. I can provide no proof of its validity, but I believe the findings of this study support it.

In my view, the image of the waning, melting giant sword subtly suggests multiple transformations—changes of state, conversions—paradoxically involving both violent, combustive change and gentler,

112 Text and translation from Nicholson, 'Literal Meaning', 183.

113 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 531.

114 Hill, 'Tropological Context', 531; see also Helder, 'Beowulf and Typological Symbolism', 40–48.

115 Frank, 'Scandal', 864.

116 This is inevitable, since we face an embarrassment of fundamental unknowns: we do not know (and probably never shall) who composed *Beowulf*, or why or how, or when or where (with any precision), or whether it was performed, or, if it was, why, when, how, by whom and for whom. These unknowns amount to a huge lack of known context.

melting transition. The remarkably rich image of the probably radiant giant sword which, if I interpret the symbolism correctly, becomes a simultaneously fiery and icy candle, which in turn becomes a shining hilt-Cross, emerges from and subsumes changes such as the following:

- (a) The waning of the moon into dark nothingness. It is surely no coincidence that, at its demise, the giant sword which (like the Old Norse sword *Angrvaðill* 'Grief-Wane') dispatches the lunar giants who formerly possessed it, is first said to *wanian* 'wane' (1607). Then, as now, this verb could describe the diminution of the moon. We may also compare the lunar imagery on the Bedale sword-hilt, which happens also to lack its blade.
- (b) The waning of the sun as it is overtaken during a solar eclipse by the dark and implicitly icy moon, from whose shadow, however, it soon emerges. Again, we may compare the Bedale pommel.
- (c) The death of Christ the Sun on the Cross and his resurrection in springtime.
- (d) Cain's fratricidal *ecg* 'edge' and the solar sword of Ing/Yngvi-Freyr into the Cross of Christ. This could be a case of turning a sword-like coulter into the Cross, rather than a sword into a ploughshare.
- (e) The overcoming of the torments of Hell, both fiery and icy;¹¹⁷ possibly we should also imagine meltwater from the sword's 'battle-icicles' as purifying the waters of the mere.
- (f) The element-melting fire of the apocalypse which will signal the Lord's return (2 *Peter* 3:10).
- (g) Most fundamentally, the old, unenlightened, sinful, but partly redeemable, 'icy' world of Germanic paganism, which is purified by and subsumed into the warmth of Christianity.

117 Cf. the Old English poem *Judgement Day II* (191–3): *Ðær synt to sorge ætsonne gemenged / se þrosma lig and se þrece gicela, / swiðe hat and ceald helle tomiddes* 'There as pain are mingled together the fire of smokes and the violence of icicles, great heat and cold in the midst of Hell'; G. D. Caie (ed.), *The Old English Poem Judgement Day II: A Critical Edition with Editions of Bede's De Die Iudicii and the Hatton 113 Homily Be Domes Dæge* (Cambridge, 2000), 94 (translation mine); cf. DOE s.v. *gicel*, *gicele*.

I have presented here a personal, subjective, non-definitive list, as it seems to me that the image of the waning, melting giant sword is meant to be elusively allusive; there is no one interpretative key to unlock a specific meaning or meanings to this captivating image. At root, I suspect it was designed to inspire personal, nuanced reflection upon, and appreciation of, the possibility of accommodative transition from native heathenism to Christianity.¹¹⁸ If so, it would not be the only early Anglo-Saxon object to reflect such a transition or to provoke such thought. The Franks Casket from eighth-century Northumbria, for example, juxtaposes scenes of the mythological Germanic smith Weland (maker of Beowulf's mail-coat) and the Adoration of the Magi.¹¹⁹ Many readers will doubtless also be familiar with images of a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon helmet from Benty Grange, Derbyshire, photographs of which in its surviving, incomplete state are often published.¹²⁰ It is surmounted by a gilded boar-figurine, which prompts comparison with the boar-adorned helmets of *Beowulf* and the radiant boar-steeds of Freyr and Freyja.¹²¹ But what is less well known is that the same helmet

118 With the potentially many-layered complexity of the poem's sword-imagery, compare Pope Gregory's complicated thoughts on swords, which include references to an *immolationis gladius* 'sword of conversion' (*Moralia on Job* 25.16 in *PL* 76, column 329), a *sanctæ prædicationis gladius* 'sword of holy preaching' and a *diabolicæ persuasionis gladius* 'sword of diabolical persuasion' (34.17, *PL* 76, column 726).

119 For photographs and discussion, see R. Abels, 'What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 84 (2009), 549–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0038713400209305>. Abels observes (581): 'The Christianity that took root in England in the seventh and eighth centuries represented more than a superficial syncretism in which Christianity transformed to its uses native culture; rather, it was a fusion of different cultures in which Christianity itself was profoundly transformed.' See also B. Yorke, 'Ingeld, Weland and Christ', *Quaestio Insularis* 14 (2013), 1–14; B. Yorke, 'The Fate of Otherworldly Beings after the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons', in C. Ruhmann and V. Brieske (ed.), *Dying Gods: Religious Beliefs in Northern and Eastern Europe in the Time of Christianisation* (Hannover, 2015), 167–75; Ridsen, *Beasts of Time*, 43.

120 As, for example, in *KB*, xv, fig. 7.

121 The seventh-century 'Pioneer' helmet from Wollaston, Northamptonshire is also topped by a boar-figurine; see J. E. Saraceni, 'Saxon Helmet Restored', *Archaeology* 50 (1997), <http://archive.archaeology.org/9711/newsbriefs/saxon.html>; Meadows, *Pioneer Burial*, 17–31, 58–61. For a sixth- or seventh-century boar-figurine which may have topped another Anglo-Saxon helmet, see J. Foster, 'A Boar Figurine from Guilden Morden, Cambs.', *Medieval Archaeology* 21 (1977), 166–7. Also comparable are the Sutton Hoo helmet's 'eyebrows' in the form of boars with golden heads. By contrast, warriors depicted on helmet-fittings from the Staffordshire hoard wear helmets topped by raptors; see C. Fern, A. Osinska, L. Martin and G. Speake,

originally had another key feature: a large silver Cross on its noseguard (see Figure 6).¹²² As such, this artefact represents a remarkable example of—possibly Ing-related—heathen and Christian syncretism from a time and place with which the poet of *Beowulf* could have been familiar.¹²³



Figure 6. Reconstruction of the Benty Grange Helmet.
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'The Catalogue Part 8: Helmet Fittings', *Staffordshire Hoard Catalogue* (2017), nos. 596 [K55 *et al.*], 597 [K237 *et al.*], 606 [K1016], https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2457-1/dissemination/pdf/10_Catalogue/Cat_8_Helmet_fittings_web.pdf

- 122 On this helmet, see R. Bruce-Mitford and M. R. Luscombe, 'The Benty Grange Helmet', in R. Bruce-Mitford (ed.), *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (London, 1974), 223–52; G. Lester, 'The Anglo-Saxon Helmet from Benty Grange, Derbyshire', *Old English Newsletter* 21 (1987), 34–5; also the discussion in D. Tweddle, *The Anglian Helmet from 16–22 Coppergate* (London, 1992).
- 123 For another possible instance of the use of the heathen image of the boar in the service of Christianity at around the same time, see M. King, 'Besette swinlicum: Sources for the Iconography of the Sutton Hoo Shoulder-Clasps', in G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: The World Through Their Eyes* (Oxford, 2014), 89–102.

If my findings about the significance of the waning giant sword are broadly correct, they strengthen the widely accepted perception that *Beowulf* is a richly thought-provoking blend of Christian and heathen themes. Its subtle symbolism conveys to me an implicitly redemptive message about how the icy coldness of heathenism may 'melt' into the blazing Cross of Christ, a message suggestive of a measured, humane approach to religious conversion in keeping with the pragmatic *modus operandi* of the Gregorian Mission to England. Any readers who entertain the conclusions of this long study, but whose thoughts have before now wandered to Eddard Stark's sword 'Ice'—or, indeed, to Robert Frost's thoughts on how the world will end¹²⁴—may find it congenial to reflect that the central importance of the image of the waning sword to *Beowulf* makes this greatest of Old English poems the original 'song of ice and fire'.¹²⁵

124 See his poem 'Fire and Ice' in E. C. Lathem (ed.), *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (London, 2001), 220.

125 We first meet the ancient, huge and justice-dispensing sword Ice, which is cleaned in a divine wood and ultimately melted down, in G. R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones: Book One of a Song of Ice and Fire* (1996, rpt. London, 2011), 12. Only shortly before Ice's introduction, we read that a White Walker's ice-crystal sword was 'alive with moonlight' (8–10).

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Supplementary Note

Too late for inclusion in the body of the text, there came to my attention two early Anglo-Saxon artefacts important for my discussion, in Chapter 4, of the close association of swords, and especially hilts, with the Cross in pre-Conquest England.

On close inspection, one side of a gold and garnet cloisonné pommel from Dinham in Shropshire, which dates from the early seventh century, reveals a Crucifixion-scene with a tall central Cross flanked by two smaller crosses, doubtless those of the two thieves. At the base of the Cross are the heads of two open-mouthed beasts, one on each side, which appear to attack the shaft. The Cross's shaft would have been in line with the sword's grip and blade, which might therefore have been imagined together as a continuation of the Cross. The pommel's other side presumably relates to the same scene: it shows a large Cross-roundel (suggestive of a sun-Cross and a haloed Christ) flanked by two smaller cross-roundels (suggestive of parhelia and the two thieves). Additionally, the pommel's sloping, hill-like shape may suggest Golgotha. For photographs and discussion, see L. Webster, 'Visual Literacy in a Protoliterate Age', in P. Hermann (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture* (Viborg, 2005), 21–46 at 32–3 (figs. 7 a and b); also C. Fern, T. Dickinson and L. Webster (ed.), *The Staffordshire Hoard: An Anglo-Saxon Treasure* (London, 2019), 114 (fig. 2.86), an important book which should be consulted regarding the pommels and sword-fittings from this hoard that I mention in Chapter 4 (note especially the book's discussion of cross-symbolism on 253–5).

Webster, 'Visual Literacy', 32, 34–5 (figs. 8 a and b) also draws attention to the remarkable decoration of coiled snakes amid vegetation on an eighth-century, gilded-silver sword-grip from Fetter Lane, London. She suggests that 'the chi-like configuration of the creature [on one side of the grip], encircled in its own halo of thorns, may even at

some level, be intended as an emblem of the redemptive message of Christ's Crucifixion' (32). I would also raise the possibility of an allusion to the concepts of the eclipse-dragon and heaven's wood. Webster goes on to observe, in relation to the description of the inscribed hilt of the giant sword in *Beowulf*, that 'Even though this is of course a poetical description of a symbolic object, the very fact that a sword might carry—or be thought to carry—complex religious iconography lends credence to the likelihood of reading other such concealed messages in weaponry and indeed, other secular artefacts' (36).

Also too recently for consideration in this book, there appeared the final volume (in two parts) of the Frankfurt commentary on Old Norse Eddic poetry, which treats some of the important mythological poems that I examine (*Völuspá*, *Hávamál*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*): K. von See, B. La Farge and K. Schulz, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Bd. 1/I, 1/II: Götterlieder* (Heidelberg, 2019).

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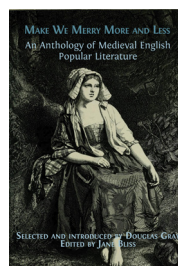
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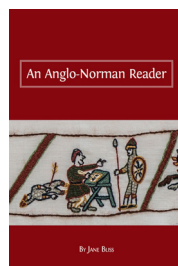
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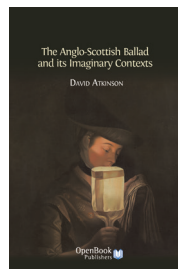
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The Waning Sword

Conversion Imagery and Celestial Myth in *Beowulf*

EDWARD PETTIT

The image of a giant sword melting stands at the structural and thematic heart of the Old English heroic poem *Beowulf*. This meticulously researched book investigates the nature and significance of this golden-hilted weapon and its likely relatives within *Beowulf* and beyond, drawing on the fields of Old English and Old Norse language and literature, liturgy, archaeology, astronomy, folklore and comparative mythology.

In Part I, Pettit explores the complex of connotations surrounding this image (from icicles to candles and crosses) by examining a range of medieval sources, and argues that the giant sword may function as a visual motif in which pre-Christian Germanic concepts and prominent Christian symbols coalesce.

In Part II, Pettit investigates the broader Germanic background to this image, especially in relation to the god Ing/Yngvi-Freyr, and explores the capacity of myths to recur and endure across time. Drawing on an eclectic range of narrative and linguistic evidence from Northern European texts, and on archaeological discoveries, Pettit suggests that the image of the giant sword, and the characters and events associated with it, may reflect an elemental struggle between the sun and the moon, articulated through an underlying myth about the theft and repossession of sunlight.

The Waning Sword: Conversion Imagery and Celestial Myth in Beowulf is a welcome contribution to the overlapping fields of *Beowulf*-scholarship, Old Norse-Icelandic literature and Germanic philology. Not only does it present a wealth of new readings that shed light on the craft of the *Beowulf*-poet and inform our understanding of the poem's major episodes and themes; it further highlights the merits of adopting an interdisciplinary approach alongside a comparative vantage point. As such, *The Waning Sword* will be compelling reading for *Beowulf*-scholars and for a wider audience of medievalists.

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